The Magazine for Golden Age and Silver Age Collectibles

COMIC BOOK MARKETPLACE

No. 30
December 1995

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CBM CONTENTS

Volume 2 • Number 30
December 1995
A Gemstone Publication

THE EYE-SEARING FLASH OF THE EXPLOSION...
"THAT EXPLOSION! REX SACRIFICED HIS EXISTENCE TO PROTECT EARTH!
ALREADY MY LIMBO-MIGHT IS INCREASING! YOUR PUNY SOCIETY OF HEROES IS FINISHED, SPIDER! YOU HAVE SEEN REX ROBOT AND CAPTAIN WHIZ PERISH!! I SHALL NOW REFLECT INTO YOUR MINDS A VISION
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Issue Number #30, December 1995

"DEEP INTO MYSTIC INDIA... with its fabulous treasures and strange secrets..." begins the splash panel from the "Jewels of Igoor" published in *Suspense Comics* #2 (Feb 1944). page ... 46

Welcome Aboard!

As many of you know, CBM contributors are avid and sincere hobbyists who really love comics. Two collectors that fit that description are Phil Barnhart and Scotty Moore and I'm happy to announce that both these venerable gentlemen will be joining our staff as regular contributors.

Phil Barnhart has been enthusiastically collecting for the past ten years. His first exposure to the hobby was through one of his best friends, Paul Rathbun... and it was Paul who first introduced him to the wonders of Golden Age comics. As his collecting and research interests evolved, Phil began focusing on many of the more "esoteric" and obscure 1940's titles and companies. Almost "compelled" to learn more about the historical events and circumstances that led to the publication of these titles, he started researching in earnest. This intense interest eventually led to the creation of *The Comic Archives* with partner Scotty Moore. *Comic Archives* is dedicated to the exploration of comic history, popular culture, and nostalgia. Phil has shared with me on numerous occasions that finding and writing about new discoveries in the history of comic books is what he enjoys most. While Phil is not pursuing his interests in comics, he works as a process development scientist for IDEC Pharmaceutical in San Diego. Fate was smiling on CBM when he and his wife, Doris, moved from Colorado to the San Diego area 18 months ago. They've even said that they plan to make Southern California their permanent home.

The other half of the *Comic Archives* team is veteran collector and researcher Scotty Moore, Scotty is a native San Franciscan now living in the Central Valley (Stockton). He was raised in "the city" during the late 1960's, and it was during this time that Scotty started collecting comics (unlike many, Scotty incredible Mom actually encouraged him to read comics). Like me, his favorite titles were mostly DC, including *Strange Adventures* (especially those with *Atomic Knights*), *Mystery In Space*, and *Rip Hunter*. Scotty also collected *The Fly*. He now avidly collects Silver Age original art, Pre-Code horror comics, strips like "Flash Gordon" and "Prince Valiant", and ... oh yes... and he still reads his *Adventures of The Fly* collection.

Scotty spent eight years in college and law school, and works as a negotiator for a small defense related firm that provides classified services for the US and NATO governments. He does all this, and still somehow finds time for comics!

I'd like to extend an enthusiastic and heartfelt "welcome aboard" to Phil Barnhart and Scotty Moore.

Gary

Gary M. Carter

PS Beginning with the next issue (#31) the cover price of CBM goes up a buck... and that means it's the last chance to subscribe at the old rates. If you've been thinking about subscribing, now is a great time... as the new rates take effect December 15th, 1995. I still encourage everyone to purchase CBM at your local dealer. But if you can't find CBM in your area, a subscription is an excellent alternative. Either way, thanks for reading the only magazine dedicated to the interests of Golden Age and Silver Age Collectors... *Comic Book Marketplace*!

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8,000 Scripts For ME

Really appreciated your feature on Vincent Sullivan and his ME line of comics in CBM #27. When I was growing up my favorite comics were being published by Dell and ME… I hardly paid any attention to any other companies' products. I guess that's because I was more interested in adventure and western comics than those featuring superheroes!

If you don't mind I'd like to add a few facts to Pat Calhoun's round robin interviews (Vin Sullivan). Right from the beginning I was a big fan of "Dan Brand and Tipi," the backup feature that ran in Durango Kid comics. Of course it certainly helped that it was illustrated by Frank Frazetta. I remember asking Frazetta, back in the 1960s, if he knew who had written the feature… but he told me that he never knew who it was. So, since I was also corresponding with Gardner Fox at the time, I asked him if he might have been the writer. His reply was, "Though I mostly wrote all of the comics ME put out, I did not write the Dan Brand and Tipi. I am not 100% sure, but I think it may have been Ray Krank. I wrote approximately 8,000 scripts for ME during the years of its existence, according to my records."

Since the Thun'da comics were (and are) among my favorites of the period (or any other, for that matter!) I also made a point of asking Gardner Fox about this series. His reply was: "As to the title Thun'da, my recollection is that the word Thun'da was suggested by Ray Krank, editor of ME at the time… due to its resemblance to the word "thunder." When I was called into the offices to discuss the new jungle comic that ME wanted to publish, Ray Krank mentioned the overall concept of a modern man thrown into an unknown, prehistoric world in the heart of Africa. He mentioned Frank's name… and quite probably said he had brought in some sketches and drawings and they wanted to go from there. In other words, the story was mine, though based very definitely on Frank Frazetta's general over-all story idea. In other words, I reduced it to captions, dialogue and plot. Incidentally, I think Frazetta's rendition of the Thun'da yarn was superb. In my humble judgment, that book was one of the finest comics ever turned out."

At about the same period, during a telephone conversation with Frazetta, I asked him why he had only illustrated the first issue of Thun'da and not gone on to do any other issues. Frank told me that it was because he found out that ME had negotiated a contract with Columbia Pictures to produce a serial based on the Thun'da comic (it was titled "King of the Congo" and starred Buster Crabbe as Roger Drum). Frank received nothing from these negotiations, nor from any profits of the serial, and since he felt that it was his idea, even though Gardner Fox had written the story, and that ME had not played fair with him, he quit working for ME in protest.

I hope that you and your readers find some interest therein. Sincerest regards,

Robert R. Barrett, Kansas

Trina Writes

Thank you so much for your help in getting me together with Jim Korkis, and thank you for the back issues of Comic Book Marketplace - they are wonderful! At last, a magazine about comics that has articles I find interesting and want to read! Romance comics! Alex Schomburg! Matt Baker! Carl Barks! And big beautiful cover reproductions in color, yow! Cheers,

Trina Robbins, California

Thank You, Dick Ayers

Couldn't be more delighted to be subscribing to Comic Book Marketplace again. I didn't realize how much I missed it until I started to read the marvelous articles in issues #24-27. I'm so pleased that you are back in the original format with more in-depth articles and features. Pat Calhoun's interview… with the Dick Ayers contribution in issue #27 (and the inclusion of Ghost Rider #10 in your cover gallery) spurred me to write to you.

I envy Pat for having had the chance to meet Dick Ayers. I would have loved to have met him myself. I would thank him for many years of pleasure I've had reading his stories. To me, the name Dick Ayers is synonymous with exciting adventure comics. I am a great fan of his and grew up reading his work. Not to give away my age or anything, but I can (just barely) remember reading the great ME heroes, The Avenger and the original Ghost Rider, just before they went out of publication.

Ayers brought a deep expressionistic style to comics that had largely been missing before him. His characters existed in a dimension of reality based on profound emotion. They were wracked by a sort of overwhelming physicality, a depth of feeling one didn't often see in the comics. His characters showed love, hate, fear, joy, and the frustration of grappling with life's challenges. They didn't just stand on the page, they thrust themselves out from it, often writhing in effort and conflict. Moreover, Ayers' characters didn't look like everyone else's… they have a distinctive appearance that stands out immediately to the experienced comic reader.

The Sotheby's Catalogue for the June 1994 Comic Books and Comic Art Auction said of Ayers, "His clean, straightforward style of art… has always been one of his strongest trademarks in the comic industry." And it refers to the original Ghost Rider as "…one of the most popular western comics ever produced."

I couldn't agree more with these sentiments. It is long past time for a thorough critical appraisal and retrospective of Ayers' work. I for one would be happy to purchase a book dedicated to his work as I (and many others) have bought works on Alex Schomburg, Lou Fine, Jack Cole, Joe Kubert, Steve Ditko, Jack Kirby, and others. Certainly Ayers belongs in the pantheon of Gold and Silver Age Artists.

The earliest of Ayers' work I remember is the Avenger, but perhaps another CBM reader has a more detailed knowledge of his career. Ayers' work includes western, superhero, adventure and horror stories. He worked all through the fifties and was a mainstay of the Marvel revival of the sixties. He's teamed up with the finest artists of his generation. His work with Jack Kirby alone would fill a large volume.

Mentioning Jack Kirby brings up an apt comparison. While Kirby is often credited with breaking the line of the frame, Ayers' charac-

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LAST CHANCE! Enter the great Bella Kimelfeld Comic Trivia Contest

Round five! Enter the great CBM Bella Kimelfeld Comic Book Trivia contest! Contest rules: Starting with #26, each issue of CBM has contained ten tantalizing and challenging comic trivia questions (in multiple choice format) for a total of 50 questions . The individual with the highest score wins first place! Second highest, second place, and so on until the top ten contestants are chosen. In case of a tie, a random drawing will be held to determine the winners. No employees of Gemstone Publications or Diamond Comic Distributors are eligible to enter. One entry per issue per person.

1. Who is Bella Kimelfeld? a. A stockholder in the Lev Gleason company b. Pseudonym for Robert S. Landsdown c. The Whizzer's sidekick in only one story d. Advertising director for Avon from 1950-1953

2. Who is Zach Gristle? a. A character in an EC story b. Opened the very first comic shop in California in 1958 c. Appeared only twice as a secondary character in The Fox and The Crow d. A cartoon character that never actually appeared in a comic story but did appear regularly on covers

3. Where did the character Perry White first appear? a. In Action Comics b. On the Superman radio program c. in the Superman Newspaper strip d. In the movie serial

4. Who trained the Boy Commandos? a. Rip Carter b. Dandy Dolan c. Fred Drake d. Don Daring

5. KaZar grew up in what African country? a. Tanzania b. Belgian Congo c. Nigeria d. Rhodesia

6. Dr. Doom's first "assistant" was named: a. Boris b. Frederic c. Wolfgang d. Hans

7. The first new super-hero to be created in the 1950s was: a. Fighting American b. Strongman c. Nature Boy d. Captain Flash

8. He's more fantastic than King Kong!: a. Titano b. Konga c. The Golden Gorilla d. Grodd

9. Who is the head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in early Captain America stories? a. J. Arthur Grover b. J. Edgar Hoover c. J. Edward Justice d. J. Albert Alan

10. The idea for The Funnies (1929) is usually credited to which comic book pioneer? a. George Delacorte b. M.C. Gaines c. Leverett S. Gleason d. Harry I. Wildenberg

11. Which of the following books was not written by Dr. Fredric Wertham, M.D.? a. Television and Juvenile Delinquency b. Dark Legend c. The Show of Violence d. The Brain as an Organ

12. Which of the following was not a part of the originally adopted standards of The Comics Code Authority: Code for Editorial Matter: (Dialogue) a. No derogatory slang terms shall be used when describing individuals of different races, religions, ethnic backgrounds, and/or national origins. b. Profanity, obscenity, smut, vulgarity or words or symbols which have acquired undesirable meanings are forbidden. c. Special precautions to avoid references to physical afflictions or deformities shall be taken. d. Although slang and colloquialisms are acceptable, excessive use should be discouraged and wherever possible good

continued on page 72

ters often break the surface of the page itself. His art has a depth to it that often has his characters reaching out of the page in a sort of imprecation to the reader. What Ayers' fan is not familiar with that beseeching look that reveals his characters at the absolute depth of their struggle?

One other point about Ayers: it's a shame that he never illustrated a female superhero or protagonist. Ayers was ahead of his time in drawing women of strength. His women were beautiful...often vulnerable but never feeble, frail or fragile. At a time when women characters were secondary to their male heroes, Ayers' women revealed an inner strength and resolve that could have been the basis of an exciting super heroine.

I would love to see Dick Ayers treated as a subject of a longer more scholarly article in CBM. I think many CBM readers remember Dick and would appreciate seeing an historical perspective of his work and a serious appraisal of his contribution to the art and industry of comics. Perhaps the most excellent Pat Calhoun or another of you contributing authors could write such an article. What do you think, Gary? Yours truly,

Collin Alscher, California

Sticker Shock!

When Comics went from 10¢ to 12¢, I was only eight years old and it didn't bother me too much; I could still get two comics with my 25-cent allowance. However, my older brother, Michael, was outraged at this insidious plot. He complained loud and long. But after the CBM's (Comic Book Mafia) head man paid our home a visit, he kept his mouth shut. I remember what the man in the white suit and black fedora said, "The Comic Book Mafia doesn't exist and we'll kill anybody that says so!" My turn to become outraged didn't arrive until about eight years later.

By then I had grown complacent with the 12¢ comic book. However, I did notice the warning signs of an impending price increase. All of a sudden the Gold Key comics went to 15¢ but this didn't bother me too much since Dell Comics had tried something like that in the late 50's. DC then started to make the 12¢ price on its comics larger, just the way they

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P: Pedigree (AL: Allentown, BM: Bethlehem, BW: Bldg White, CE: Circle 8, CA: Cosmic Airplane, CC: Carson City, CH: Chicago, CT: Coat Case, DV: Denver, FC: File Copy, GA: Games File Copy, JS: Jerry Siegel, LA: Larson, MA: Murphy Anderson, MH: Mile High, MV: Mohawk Valley, OV: Overstreet, PA: Pennsylvania, SF: San Francisco, WM: White Mountain)

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0	1	2	2.5	3	3.3	4	5	6	6.5	7	7.5	8	6.5	9	9.5	10

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3rd App Catwoman
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5th App Joker
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FN+ 45 (5.5) $3,750

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(#1) Intro/Origin Toro
VG+ 25 (3.5) $4,250

MVL Incredible Hulk 1
Origin/1st App Hulk
VF/N- 65 (4.0) $6,250

DC More Fun Comics 52
Mod. Restored-S.Ciccone
M aVFN 60 (4.0) $19,500

DC More Fun Comics 53
Origin Spectre Part 2
FN/VFN 50 (4.5) $19,500

DC More Fun Comics 55
(Scarce) Intro/1st App Dr. Fate
G/VG 15 (6.5) $3,000

DC New Adventure 24
Mile High
VF/N/NM 70 (3.5) $5,000

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Mile High
NM 80 (2.0) $14,000

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DC Wonder Woman 9
Pennsylvania Copy
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did with the 10-cent emblem in 1961. Still, I was as blind as ever, ignoring the omens.

Then, one spring night, as I was reading a new comic I had purchased at the corner store, I saw IT! My eyes were transfixed on the little cover reproductions DC used to preview coming issues. There it was...the 15¢ price tag on a Wonder Woman cover. "NO!!" I screamed, "NO!!!"

I threw open the front door, dashed into the street and hurled my body onto the pavement, wanting to end it all. However, at 1:00 a.m. on West Grant Street in Chickasaw, Alabama, there is no traffic to speak of. All I heard was my neighbor's voice: "What the hell is that stupid kid up to? I haven't seen anyone do that in eight years!"

I awoke later that morning (in mourning) hoping against hope that it was all just a bad dream and my comic books would still be 12¢. I dressed nervously and hopped on my bike for the ride to the local drug store where I purchased most of my new comics. Slowly, I opened the door. I froze.

There was the comic book rack, seemingly mocking me, daring me to come forward. The shower scene from Psycho flashed through my mind. I swallowed hard. I slid my feet on the tiled floor, not wanting to find out if the horror of horrors was true. I glanced at the wire rack. I saw Fantastic Four, Superman, Spider-Man, and then...then...there it was! An August, 1969 issue of Wonder Woman had that accursed 15¢ symbol on it! (How appropriate... Wonder Woman was crying on the cover.) The clerk glared at me but the pharmacist nonchalantly spoke up: "Oh, he's just going through the 'Change of Price Syndrome'." (I wonder if I could have sued if I had lawyer William Kunstler then.)

Over the years, my feelings on the price increases have run the garnbit from horror-stricken to outraged. There's an entire generation of comic collectors out there who have known nothing but steady price increases. In fact, they wouldn't know what to think if the price of a new comic didn't go up every few months. "What? No price jump this month? Something's wrong! Hello, comic book publishers? What are you trying to do? Screw up my psychological profile? I demand a price increase!"

I remember when I begged my father for 12¢ to buy an Amazing Spider-Man #13 (which was a bad move when you have seven sisters and four brothers). "Twelve cents for a funny book? That's too much!" I weaseled the money out of him but I wonder about the future...

"Daddy, could I have ten dollars."

"And what do you want ten dollars for?"

"I want to buy the latest issue of Spider-Man."

Stephen Barrington, Alabama

I went through the same sticker shock your brother did. One day 50¢ buys five comics... next day only four. The event was so traumatic for my brother and I that we still get nauseous when we reminisce about that black day in 1961.

Steranko Argosy

Thanks for the excellent special issue (CBM #28) on Steranko. His prolific body of work has always deserved more attention. The innovative artwork and style he gave to Silver Age Marvel's were some of my favorites. In your Steranko checklist (CBM #28, p. 71) you did not list several magazine covers for "Argosy" published in 90/91.

Ron Laybon, California

Point well taken, thanks for the update Ron.

Relaxed Standards

Wanted to add an observation of my own to Ken Bower's piece in the October '95 CBM Forum on expanded price spreads. He notes that, over the past few years, the difference in price guide values between lower and higher grade comics has widened considerably, but fails to mention something I find extremely interesting.

Corresponding with the widening gap in values has been a relaxing of standards for grading lower grade comics. For instance, Overstreet's Price Guide #14 (1984) states that a Good condition comic is "well-read... but perfectly acceptable with no chunks missing, tape or brown pages." Overstreet's Grading Guide (1992), on the other hand, says "many Very Good condition comics have minor tape repair" and that "pages may be brown" on a VG book. Also by 1992 standards, a comic can have "small pieces" or back cover/interior coupons missing and still be in Good condition as long as "readability is preserved."

I'm using these particular defects as examples; grading standards in general have been relaxed to the point that what was at best a low Good in 1984 has risen a full grade or more by 1992. So, while a Good condition book is now worth a smaller percentage of a Near Mint book, the Good book is also more "beat up." The most significant change, then, is not in the value of a low grade comic, but in the recognition of what constitutes an "acceptable" or "collectable" copy. The true "value" of a comic book will always be in its

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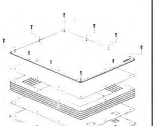

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Action Comics

3 VG Very Rare ... $4000
10 GD+ Superman-c ... $1,250
19 VF Larson copy ... ...
Coupon clipped ... $1,800
19 FN- rtr at spine ... $710
25 VG auto. by Siegal ... $415

Adventure Comics

44 VG/FN ... $1700
53 VF "D" copy ... $1,100
54 FN/VF staple pull ... $670
56 VF "D" copy lt cr/c ... $1,050
73 VF+ ... $10,000

All American Comics

16 VF- slight rest ... $25,000

All Flash Quarterly

1 VF+ ... $10,000
22 VF++ ... $325

All New Comics

15 FN+ Rare ... $700

All Select Comics

11 FN+ 1st B Phantom ... $600

All Star Comics

8 FN slight rest. ... $4,500
31 FN Glossy ... $350
34 VG- Tape ... $200
56 FN- ... $320

All Top Comics

8 VF/NM ... $1,700

All Winners Comics

1 VF++ ... $11,000
5 VF/NM+ ... $1,500
10 FN+ ... $400
16 NM "D" copy ... $1,100
16 FN/VF ... $395
17 NM "D" copy ... $1,070
18 NM "D" copy ... $1,070
21 VF- ... $3,000

Amazing Man Comics

5 FN restoration ... $4,000

Amazing Mystery Funnies

V2 #7 VG ... $700
V2 #12 VF Overstreet copy with White pages ... $1,800

Amazing Spider-Man

1 VF/NM (NM-cover/with slightly tan inferior ... $12,000
39 VF ... $103
43 VF/NM Dale stamp tc ... $70
50 VF++ ... $275
63 VF/NM ... $42
64 NM ... $50
65 NM ... $53
68 NM ... $50

America's Best Comics

6 VG ... $100
21 VF infinity-c ... $250

Avengers

1 VF lt cr. bc ... $995

Batman

1 VG+ Twilight copy ... $13,000
1 VF minor rest ... $19,000
1 FN rest by M Wilson ... $13,000
3 FN/VF mod. rest ... $2,200
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Small tr. fc. ... $2,100
12 FN- ... $780
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17 VG ... $300
18 GD ... $157
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20 GD/VG ... $215
20 GD+ ... $190
21 VF/NM
tiny nick out fc ... $1,400
21 VF sm. nc ... $600
23 VF/NM Twilight copy ... $3,000
26 NM- Twilight copy
slight cov tan ... $1,300
27 VG/FN ... $360
29 FN++ White pgs ... $430
49 VF/NM+ Twilight copy ... $1,700
55 VF+ Twilight copy ... $1,000
56 VF++ Twilight copy ...
Scarce! ... $900

Blue Bolt

114 VF++ Overstreet copy ... $450
116 FN/VF Overstreet copy ... $150

Captain America Comics

1 VF-Cover cleaned ... $20,000
2 FN/VF M.Anderson copy ... $5,500
3 FN/VF cov cleaned ... $3,300
7 NM/MT ... $6,000
30 VF/NM "D" copy ... $2,000
32 VF/NM+ "D" copy ... $1,900
35 VF Cosmic Aeroplane ... $1,200
55 NM ... $1,500

Detective Comics

1 PR/FA copy ... $9,000
2 GD+ taped spine ... $4,000
27 VG/VG+ unrestored ... CALL
27 FN/VF mnr. tr sesl ... $75,000
38 FN/VF mod. rest ...
by Ciocoli ... $10,000
40 NM Finest existing copy ...
... $10,000
44 NM killer copy ... $3,000
45 NM 1st Joker in Det ... $4,700
45 VF+ Twilight copy
Sun shadow tc ... $2,000
47 FN/VF Scarce ... $1,100
48 VF Sharp ... $1,100
50 VF+ Twilight copy ... $1,500
59 VF/NM Twilight copy ... $2,300
66 VF+ Twilight copy ... $3,200
75 NM- Twilight copy ... $1,900
77 VF/NM+ Twilight copy ... $1,300
81 VF+ Twilight copy ... $800
91 VF/NM+ Twilight copy ... $1,600
104 FN+ Twilight copy ... $215
110 VF/NM+ Twilight copy ... $1,100
111 NM Twilight copy ... $1,250
111 VF/NM ... $525
116 NM- Twilight copy ... $1,225
120 VF/NM+ Twilight copy ... $3,000
124 VF Twilight copy ... $700
130 VF/NM+ Twilight copy ... $1,025
132 VF/NM+ Twilight copy ... $750
152 VF/NM+ Twilight copy ... $1,000
181 VF/NM Sharp ... $450

Exciting Comics

9 FN+ NC Overstreet copy ... $1,700
29 FN+ "D" copy ... $175
40 VF+ "D" copy ... 245
56 FN/VF "D" copy ... $195
56 VF/NM+ "D" copy ... 360

Fantastic Four

1 VF ... $10,000
1 FN+ cov cleaned ... $3,000
6 FN+ ... $380

Flash Comics

7 VG/FN Glossy ... $675
8 FN+ Classic-c ... $900
13 GD+ ... $200
20 VG/FN ... $395
21 VF/NM ... $1,550
47 FN/VF Classic-c. ... $500

Green Lantern (GA)

7 VF- ... $700
13 GD/VG ... $163
15 VG- ... $195
19 VF/NM+ Ohio copy ... $1,350

Green Lantern (SA)

1 VF/NM minor ct ... $1,750
1 FN/VF ... $850

Guns Against Gangsters

5 NM LB Cole-c ... $140
6 VF/NM+ LB Cole-c ... $110

Incredible Hulk

1 VF/NM Glossy ... $10,000
4 VG+ ... $200

Journey into Mystery

83 VG/VG+ ... $715

Jungle Girl

1 FN+ ... $245

Mad

1 VG/FN ... $1,125
2 FN+ ... $415
2 VG/FN ... $300
3 VG/FN ... $180
3 GD/VG ... $100
4 FN- ... $198
5 VG+ ... $300
6 VG ... $104

Magic Comics

1 NM ... $2,000

Marvel Mystery

1 VF Extensive rest. to top of cov. ... $20,000
1 F+ tiny tr. sesl ... $50,000
back cover ... $43,000
1 VG/FN UNRESTORED!
Twilight copy ... $475
60 FN/VF Twilight copy ... $475
65 NM "D" copy ... $1,100
72 NM "D" copy ... $1,100
74 NM "D" copy ... $1,100
75 NM ... $1,100
82 VF/NM 1st Namora ... $1,850
88 VF/NM ... $950
90 VF+ ... $850

More Fun

96 NM Church copy ... $2,500

Mystery in Space

1 FN/VF ... $1,750

Mystery Men Comics

1 VG ... $2,500
1 GD ... $750

Mystic Comics (1st Series)

1 VF ... $7,000
4 VG+ ... $600
5 VF/NM SF copy ... $5,000
7 NM Chicago copy ... $4,800

New Comics

1 GD+ Scarce ... $2,900

New York World's Fair

1939 FN ... $7,500

Planet Comics

1 FN+ ... $2,200
53 FN/VF ... $225
72 VF ... $190
73 VF+ ... $200

Real Fact Comics

5 VF+ Twilight copy ... $1,500
5 GD/VG ... $212

Sensation Comics

52 NM SF copy ... $525
53 NM/MT SF copy ... $525
54 FN+ ... $95

Showcase

4 FN ... $7,500
4 VG+ ... $4,000
7 FN+ ... $600
14 FN/VF Glossy ... $2,000
15 FN Glossy ... $325
18 VF Glossy
some cov tan ... $700
21 VF ... $350
24 FN/VF ... $600

Speed Comics

1 VF/NM ... $2,200

Sub-Mariner Comics

1 VG ... $3,000
7 GD+ ... $192
17 FN ... $275
21 VG ... $190

Superman

1 FN Minor rest
white pages ... $20,000
3 GD/VG ... $900
5 GD/VG ... $485
6 VG ... $500
10 GD+ ... $258
25 FN++ Glossy ... $375
29 FN- ... $265
33 FN++ ... $305
36 FN ... $247
38 VG ... $166

Superman's Christmas Adventure

1940 FN ... $1,000

Supersnipe (Twilight Copies)

V2 #9 FN+ ... $115
V2 #11 VF/NM+ ... $220
V3 #4 NM ... $200
V3 #100 NM- ... $198
V4 #3 NM ... $175
V4 #5 VF+ ... $122
V4 #6 VF ... $113
V4 #9 VF+ ... $130
V4 #10 NM ... $160

Terrors Of The Jungle (All L.B. Cole Covers)

7 FN ... $65
9 FN ... $65
17 FN ... $125
21 VF- ... $125

Tiny Tot Comics

1 VF- ... \ $110

Weird Adventures

1 VF- ... $190

Western Bandit Trails

1 VF/NM ... $160

Wonder Woman

4 FN+ ... $450
7 VF/NM ... $1,270
8 VF/NM ... $1,100
49 VF/VF- ... $175
50 FN+ ... $110
52 VF/NM ... $155
105 FN/VF Scarce
Sharp copy ... $750

World's Best Comics

1 FN White pgs ... $3,375

X-Men Giant Size

1 VF/NM ... $470

Young Allies

1 FN Slight rest ... $2,000
9 VF Hitler, Tojo, Mussolini
cover ... $625

Zoot

10 VF/NM ... $325

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story and art, and grading standards have changed to reflect the idea, which is becoming more and more widespread (if not universal), that if it's readable, it's collectable.

And, as far as the extremes of pricing spreads go, bring on 100 to 1, I say. I'd be only too happy to buy issues of Marvel Mystery that cost $1,000 in Near Mint for $10 in Good. Thanks for listening!

Chris Gage, California

Steranko Questions

Let me congratulate CBM for its magnifi cent Steranko issue (#28). It's about time that something as sweeping as this was done to cover the career of so important a comics figure. The Steranko material coupled with the detailed article on the Shadow of the pulps are what CBM and magazines like it should be doing every issue . . not filling their pages with one or two page pieces detailing to readers what particular comics are about . . . but going in depth and giving them the low down on why particular comics are important.

In that context, I thought the market material and guest editorial commentary following the informative and educational Shadow and Steranko material seemed inappropriate, even crass by comparison. In this regard, Steven Gentner's remarks on comic book magazines was all the more significant.

As for the Steranko analysis/auto-biographical centerpiece of the issue, it was great but ultimately unsatisfying. Here is the basis of the man's legend, and although it brought into focus some aspects of his life, it still left many questions unanswered.

How successful of a musician was he? Just how did he get immediate entry into the offices of every comic book publisher in New York? How did he become involved with Harvey and Spyman? Why was he offered so much latitude at Tower for Agent X? How was he able to get complete artistic freedom while at Marvel, especially so soon after he started? Why was he the only artist at Marvel to have his original art returned? Just what was the coincidence that found him illustrating the Shadow paperback covers? How and why did he come to write his History of Comics? Will there ever be further volumes? Did he personally speak to and have acquaintance of the comics' pros he wrote about? How was he able to get permission to redesign the X-Men logo? What is the explanation of his (what I consider to be) inferior work on the X-Men? Why did Arnold Drake script those issues and why weren't they inked by him? Just how did Steranko learn how to do those wild escape stunts?

Particularly poignant were Steranko's final words on the state of today's comics. I just hope that he really can revive them, because the real shame elicited by this issue is that after all the accolades of how Steranko revolutionized comics, there is very little evidence beyond the early Bronze Age that creators or publishers have learned anything at all from him.

PS. My sincere apologies, Gary, for my comments in an earlier letter when I took you to task for ignoring the Silver Age and not doing enough articles that really got into the subject matter. This issue makes up for all of it! Thanks.

Pierre Comtois, Massachusetts

Good questions all, Pierre. It's a good thing for politicians that you're not an investigative reporter from the New York Times!

Awesome Repros

I just wanted to drop you a quick note to say thanks for Comic Book Marketplace #28 with the info on Jim Steranko. Awesome reproductions of his artwork plus an interview on his life which I found very interesting. Also I want to thank you for the Steranko comics checklist. I had just about everything on the checklist years ago but over the years I've moved so much I've misplaced a lot of it so thanks to the checklist I can now go looking for the comics of his that I'm missing. Once again thanks. Take care.

Kenneth McFarlane, New Hampshire

Evolved Romance

First off, congrats on the new revived CBM . . it's a pleasure to read and learn from it each month. Secondly, and the main point of my letter, I'm wondering how many comics fans know of the relationship comics have to the Golden Age of exploitation magazines geared to adults? (Roughly 1945-1965)

For instance, Charlton's comic, True Life Secrets (#1-29), was continued in magazine format in 1956. . they even continued the

numbering sequence (first True Life Secrets in magazine form was #3). Another example of the comics/magazine connection was the scandal magazine Secret Life. Issues #1-30 were the romance comic Diary Secrets.

In 1949, Avon published the exploitation magazine, Gangsters, Gunmolls, and G-Men. Then in 1951, Avon popped up with the comic Buck, Cuckoo, & Cockeyed (published during 1955 and 1956) using art work by many Mad-like artists including Basil Wolverton. I think that this comics/magazines connection deserves further study and I hope to read about it in a future CBM.

Finally, (and carrying the connection one step further), Michelle Nolan's excellent article on romance comics notes that many romance comics died out in the early and mid-fifties. This is exactly when the boom in romance magazines came… so the genre didn't die out, it just evolved!

Best wishes and keep up the good work.

Alan Betrock, New York

Golden Age Reprints

Can't tell you what a pleasure it is to be reading Comic Book Marketplace again. The magazine has definitely improved with "age". I want to respond to Francis Litzinger who wrote from Ontario, Canada in CBM #25 asking how he could find reprints of Golden Age stories. You suggested Jules Feiffer's most excellent 1965 book, The Great Comic Book Superheroes and Bill Black's AC Comics reprints…great suggestions. In addition, I would like to mention the following works:

The Greatest Golden Age Stories Ever Told, DC Comics 1990. This is a wonderful book full of great reprints, reproduced with the highest possible print and color values (as are most of the Greatest…Ever series).

The DC Archives. I assume from his comments that Francis is already reading these. They're costly but available.

Superman (also Batman and Shazam) from the 30's to the 70's, edited by Nelson Bridwell, Crown Books, 1971. All three books have both color and black and white reprints of Gold and Silver Age stories.

Marvel Comics #1, Marvel Comics 1990 …reprints this single groundbreaking issue. Astounding.

Comix, A History of Comics in America, by Les Daniels, 1971. An excellent book containing several complete stories including: a 1946 Blackhawk, a 1943 Superman, a 1945 Plastic Man by Jack Cole, a 1948 Sheena, a 1947 Crime Does Not Pay, a marvelous 1953 Batman-Two Face story by the great Dick Sprang. These are reprints you won't see anywhere else. Most stories are black and white. Lou Fine Comics by Greg Theakston, Pure Imagination, 1991. Has a great Black Condor story among others. A must-own book. Theakston packs a lot of Lou Fine into one soft cover. And you can never get enough Fine.

Focus on Jack Cole by Ron Goulart, Fantagraphics Books, 1986. There just aren't enough Jack Cole stories available. This volume includes Plastic Man and Daredevil as well as some of Cole's lesser known characters.

Wonder Woman by Phyllis Chesler and Gloria Steinem, Holt Reinhart and Winston, 1972. Wonder Woman's early stories are a vital part of the history of comics. There isn't now and never has been a hero even remotely like the early Wonder Woman. These stories are unique in all the ages of comics.

Special Edition Series 2: The Ray and The Black Condor by Alan Light and Ken Mitchell, Special Edition Publishing Company, 1974. Page after page of Lou Fine stories. Priceless. Move Heaven and Earth to acquire this book. (Alan Light also published a series called "Flashback" during the '70s, which featured other Golden Age super heroes. These were reproductions of individual comic books with color covers and black and white interior art.) Some of these books are out of print but they show up in bookstores and comic conventions. I assume Francis is pouring through old DC 80 and 100 page issues (Justice League, World's Finest, Batman Family and even Detective) for the Golden Age reprints that accompany the usually boring modern stories.

Speaking of DC reprints. In CBM #22 you featured DC 100 Page Super Spectacular #13 (Superman #252)). I didn't have to see Superman's shield backwards (tip of the hat to Michael Naiman) to know that everyone was suppose to be flying from left to right… I've read that comic so many times, I've practically memorized it! It is one of my most treasured books. In it you will find a Golden Age Superman, a beautiful Howard Sherman Dr. Fate story from 1940, the introduction of Hawkgirl in a stunning Sheldon Moldoff story from 1941, the Spectre by Bernard Bailey, Jack Burnley's Starman, and, most awesome of all, the only color comic book reprints of The Ray and The Black Condor. This book was my introduction to Lou Fine. I was astonished at the sophistication, sensuousness, and breath-taking movement inherent in Fine's art. Francis, if you can find this book I know you'll want to own it.

I hope these suggestions will help you enjoy more Golden Age stories. It is a pleasure to share information with other fans.

Long Live Comic Book Marketplace!

Collin Alscher, California

Excellent suggestions. I've added every one to my reference want list. Thanks for taking the time to help out fellow collectors. We appreciate it! And thanks to everyone who wrote in this time. Please note that CBM reserves the right to edit letters selected for publication for length and/or content. If you'd care to write, send your cards and letters to:

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Crom the Barbarian

BY PAT S. CALHOUN

Twenty years before Conan was first adapted to the comics page, an utterly charming Conan "knock-off" named Crom appeared in three early Avon science fiction comics. The first story is in *Out Of This World* #1, a one-shot from June 1950. In Robert E. Howard's Conan stories "By Crom!" is a phrase Conan shouts when excited, the implication being that Crom is a god or hero from Hyborian mythology or history. This reference to the source material is a "tip-of-the-hat" touch that helps the imitation acquire its own style and character. The story is titled "Crom, the Barbarian", and really does read like something out of the old *Weird Tales* pulp where Howard and others, like Clark Ashton Smith, Edmond Hamilton, and Robert Bloch, created their classic worlds of fantasy and horror.

Crom's sister is kidnapped by an old sorcerer, who demands as ransom, that Crom go on a quest to steal a flask of water from the fountain of youth in Ophir. Crom sets off, armed with his sword "Skull Cracker" and arriving in Ophir, learns that the fountain is inside the palace of Queen Tanit. He sneaks into the palace, but is spied by the Queen, who sends her pet panthers after him. Crom conquers the cats, and proceeds to the fountain, that is guarded by a monstrous serpent. The snake also falls against Crom's assaults, and as he is filling the flask Tanit comes from behind, ready to put a knife in his back. But Crom sees her reflection in the glass, and overcomes her, holding her hostage for his safe passage out of Ophir.

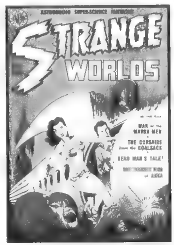
Needless to say the Queen is quite beautiful and ends up enamored of the brawny barbarian, accompanying him back to the sorcerer's island. There are some nice surprises in the showdown with the sorcerer that I won't reveal… but hope I've said enough to show that this is sword and sorcery of a most entertaining kind. The art is by John Giunta, and it strikes a nice balance, simple enough to let the story lead the way, yet detailed enough to be interesting on its own.

Also in this issue is "Lunar Station", a convincing drama about a battle on the moon with the fate of Earth at stake! This swift sci-fi yarn is aided and abetted by masterful illustration by the great Joe Kubert. The third story also has Kubert art, but in a much more primitive style as it is a reprint from Avon's ground-breaking pre-trend 1947 *Eerie* comic. And the cool robot cover by Fawcette (*sic*) wraps up the package in an appealing way.

The next Crom story is in *Strange Worlds* #1 (November 1950). I consider *Out Of This World* to be sort of a "Strange Worlds #0" for two reasons. First, of course- there is the continuation of Crom. But secondly, these two comics, sans covers, were also published as inserts in the two issues of an Avon S-F pulp called *Out Of This World Adventures*. The second Crom story, "The Spider God of Akka", also has Giunta art (signed Jay Gee), again in a ten-page story. Crom, sister Lalla, and Tanit, get lost on the way back to Ophir, and are captured by a band of apemen. When the apemen go to Ophir demanding ransom, the second-in-command turns them down, because if Tanit dies, he becomes King. So the apemen decide to sacrifice the two women to their spider god. But Crom goes to work with Skull Cracker, and the giant spider's reign of terror is ended. Then the three head back to Ophir to deal with the usurper King. This second Crom story is not as inventive as the first one was, but it's enjoyable, and Giunta does a good job on it.

This issue also has a Kubert-drawn sci-fi story, "The Corsairs from the Coalsack" (pirates from the dark nebula), a rip-snorting tale of space pirates that is the first in the Kenton of the Star Patrol series. The third yarn is a pretty straightforward ghost story. And the violence on Venus cover by Fawcette illustrates the text story, "War of the Marsh-Men".

Strange Worlds #2 (April 1951) has another spectacular sci-fi cover, again for the text story, titled with pulp grandeur, "Octopus Kings of the Lost Planet". And this time Crom is the lead feature. "The Giant



Conan "knock-off" from Avon science fiction comics

STRANGE WORLDS #1 (Nov 1950) **The space-woman counters the marsh-man's grab with a ray blast on this lurid gem by Fawcette.**

© COMICS AVON

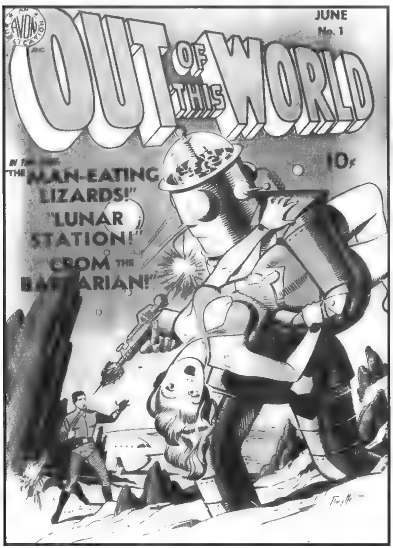
From Beyond" is not drawn by Giunta, but the art is adequate. Crom, growing tired of his life as ruler of Ophir, gets a chance for some adventure when he hears of a giant that attacked Ophir's returning trade caravans. Crom eagerly pursues the massive marauder, getting into a fight with a sea monster while tracking his quarry. The confrontation with Balthar the giant is reminiscent of Ulysses' battle with the Cyclops. The story satisfies, but still can't quite match the promise of the opening Crom yarn, where the borrowed elements were juggled in such a fresh fashion. If this series had continued, it could have fulfilled that promise, with more tales that took the derivative details of the genre and mixed them in intriguing ways.

This issue also boasts an elaborate time travel tale, rendered by sci-fi genius Wally Wood. Rounding things out is "Dara of the Vikings", a goofy series entry where two Yanks in a raft off the coast of Greenland drift into a cove populated by two warring bands of old-style Norsemen. And Norse women too, both of the guys develop a quick admiration for their discoverer, the shapely Dara. They use some modern know-how to help fight against Dara's enemies in a simple story that's unabashedly cornball and amusing enough.

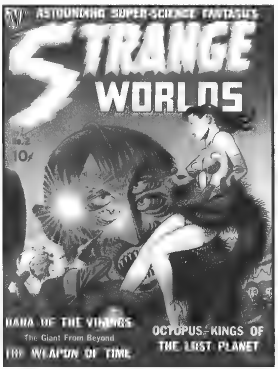
Strange Worlds ran for nine issues, then (in numbering continued from *Eerie*), published five more issues as #18-#22, a long run by Avon standards. Although there were no more Crom stories in the later issues, there was a lot more Wood and Kubert art. Strangely enough, the last three issues contain "fighting war stories" rather than S-F.

Avon, a division of the Hearst Corporation, published comics from 1945-1956. They were also the second company to produce a long-running series of paperback books, starting in 1941, after Pocket Books had achieved success with the format in 1939. ■

OUT OF THIS WORLD #1 (Jun 1950) The eternal triangle of 1950s' sci-fi: man, woman, robot.



STRANGE WORLDS #9 (Apr 1951) It's Earth-people versus alien octopi on this wild and woolly sci-fi adventure cover.



Pat S. Calhoun has been reading and collecting comic books and fantastic literature since the early 1960s. He is the author/co-author of several Overstreet Annual Price Guide *feature articles, and his "Weird Words" column in* CBM *is now in its fifth year. As* CBM*'s associate editor he has proved adept at article selecting, editing, and packaging. He is also the author of a book of poems. Pat lives with his family (including cats and guinea pigs) in Santa Rosa, California.*

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All American 16/19
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Red Raven 1
Whiz 2

Others are:

Suspense Comics 3
Mystery Men 1-10
Silver Streak 6
Blue Beetle 1
All Winners 1
Daredevil Comics 1
Hit Comics 1/5
Jungle 1
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Amazing Man 5
All Select 1
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Mystic Comics 1
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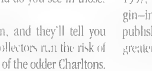
Ugh, you collect Charltons?

WHETHER YOU BOUGHT COMICS IN THE 1950S OR COLLECT COMICS FROM THE 1950S, YOU SURELY KNOW CHARLTONS. THEY'RE NOT ONLY GENERALLY JUST ABOUT THE CHEAPEST 40-YEAR OLD COMICS YOU CAN BUY, BUT THEY'RE OFTEN THE LEAST RESPECTED.

"Ugh, you collect Charltons? What in the world do you see in those? Except for the Steve Ditko issues, they're awful!"

Ask anyone who's ever purchased a Charlton, and they'll tell you they've heard that refrain. Perfectly respectable collectors run the risk of ruining their reputation by being seen with some of the odder Charltons.

Charltons, though, can be mighty appealing, if seldom compelling, in much the same way any sort of bad but unique version of popular culture can be.



In the mid-1950s, Charlton became the ghoul of the comic book publishers, feasting on the corpses of temporarily defunct comic titles. Fawcett, Toby, Comic Media, Mainline, Fox… many of their characters and titles went to Charlton. Most died quickly, and virtually all were gone within a few years.

Nobody but nobody, however, tried as many different genres as Charlton, and therein lies the fascination. And because Charltons were printed on a press in Connecticut originally intended to produce cereal boxes, they even had a much different feel than the much slicker products published by Dell, DC, and Archie. I remember, as a child, wondering why Charltons seemed so much different, and why they came out so erratically. Quite simply, Charlton was the low-rent district of the comics, but it sure was a large low-rent district, with something for everyone.

In fact, there came a point in the 1950s that, if you were sick and asked someone to bring you some comics, it was odds-on that at least one or two would be Charltons. But how do you say, "Don't bring me any Charltons."? To an adult, a comic was a comic. You just had to bite the literary bullet and hope you wouldn't receive something like *Black Fury* when you could be gifted with *Little Lulu* or *Adventure Comics*.

By 1954, Charlton had been limping along for about a decade, publishing a few comics here and there. The infamous *Space Western Comics* #40-#45, were an outrageously incompetent but memorable melding of two genres, and there were a few collectible horror and western comics during that first decade, but Charlton's entire output until 1954 consisted of less than 200 comics. That, however, changed dramatically when Charlton purchased most of the rights to Fawcett's comic book line (with the noteworthy exception of the Marvel Family).

Dan Stevenson, the tireless southern California collector who has so painstakingly researched comic book data for every decade, has made Charlton a collecting specialty, so I'm indebted to him for more complete information than I otherwise could have compiled. He notes that Charlton leaped from 56 issues in 1953 to 125 in 1954, 209 in 1955, 169 in 1956 (when there was a four-month implosion at the end of the year), 222 in 1957, 246 in 1958 and 288 in 1959, give or take a couple of books each year for which data is still lacking.

After the monumental Atlas (Marvel) implosion in the summer of 1957, few realize that Charlton became a solid No. 3–by a huge margin–in the comic book world at least through 1962! Only DC and Dell published more comics, and, of course, their circulation was much greater. Yet Charlton produced dozens and dozens of different titles. Even so, how many 35- or 40-year old Charlton titles can you name? How many Charlton characters do you care about, or how many can you identify? I'll bet the average collector would be hard pressed to come up with half a dozen.

Even so–and this is where our study of Charlton really becomes intriguing, nobody published more different comics devoted to a single theme or a single character than Charlton did from 1955-57. And what themes and characters! It isn't so much a case of what Charlton did try, as what Charlton didn't try. The company with the distribution symbol "CDC" in the upper left-hand corner–apparently an imitation of the famed Atlas globe, a distribution symbol literally tried almost everything that could be tried in the post-Comics Code world.

Check out the list accompanying this article, and you'll see an amazing group of genre comics (including many titles that make up the only examples of their genre in the field at the time and in some cases at any time!).

Here's another mind-boggling fact: Charlton produced no fewer than 65 different titles in 1955, 68 titles in 1956, and 64 titles in both 1957 and 1958. Atlas produced a few more titles than that at its peak, but DC and Dell never came close (unless you count the Dell one-shots that were part of the Four Color series). And yet today, Charlton is little more than a footnote in comics history, neither collected nor mourned except by a few.

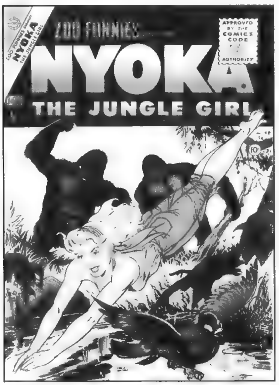
But why? The easy answer, of course, is that Charlton generally had the most lackluster stories and art in the field. Dick Giordano and his inking partners produced a few pretty covers–especially with that slick Charlton cereal-box sheen–and Ditko did some wonderful work on the science fiction and mystery material. But, for the most part, the art was about as sterile and generic as it comes and most present day collectors feel that the stories were often "hackwork" at best.

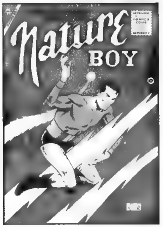
BY MICHELLE NOLAN

A REAL SWINGER
Zoo Funnies #13 (Sep 1955)
Nyoka was presented in a different costume in all 15 of her Charlton covers.

LIGHTNING STRIKES ONCE
Nature Boy #5 (Feb 1957)
Nature Boy was the only original super hero introduced in comics in either 1956 or 1957.

ALL COVERS © CHARLTON





An even more pertinent reason for Charlton's obscurity, however, is that almost all of its titles were irregularly published, usually quarterly and in no case more than six times a year over the last half of the 1950s. Charlton titles came and went with dizzying frequency. They also drove Bob Overstreet and his corps of Price Guide data collectors nuts during the 1970s and 80s, because new Charltons almost always continued the numbering of defunct titles. I can't tell you how many hours I spent trying to puzzle out Charlton's numbering switches, both as a youngster and an adult!

Of those 65 Charlton titles produced in 1955, only five were produced throughout that year on a bi-monthly basis–*Badge of Justice* (one of the few titles for which the post office forced a numbering correction, going from #22-#23 to #1-#4 that year), *Hot Rods* and *Racing Cars*, *Lash Larue Western*, *Racket Squad in Action* and *Space Adventures*. Other than those five titles, Charlton produced 60 titles covering 179 issues–or an average of three issues per title! Such statistics are unparalleled in the history of comics!

And that's what can make collecting Charltons so much fun–there are so many short runs of off-the-wall titles to collect. No matter what kind of comics you like, Charlton produced some of the goofiest, and you can have them all in some of the cheap short runs–if you can find them!

Some collect some of the Charlton titles just for the challenge of completing such obscure and rare sets. How many can boast of having all three issues of *Jerry Drummer* or all four issues of *Frank Merriwell*? Or all three issues of *Nature Boy*? Or all four *Space Adventures* that featured that fondly remembered television hero, Rocky Jones Space Ranger? You can bet it took a lot of rummaging through boxes to find all of those!

Nature Boy, in fact, was the only totally original super hero produced in all of 1956! It began with issue #3, following two issues of *Danny Blaze*, a comic devoted to the adventures of a firefighter who doubtless was less than hot. Nature Boy, with amazingly inaccurate hokum about gods and goddesses, was about as illogical a comic as ever hit the stands, especially considering how relatively late in the scheme of things he came along, but John Buscema nevertheless did some nice work on the character, just as he did on almost all of his projects.

Frank Merriwell was a true curiosity. One can only wonder at what made Charlton editors think that a dime novel sports hero from the turn of the century would sell in 1955, especially since there was (in 1955) no connection to any other current incarnation of the estimable Mr. Merriwell. It would be comparable to a comic book publisher today putting out a comic devoted to Chip Hilton, the hero of Coach Clair Bees's series of Grosset & Dunlap sports books that were so popular three or four decades ago.

Then there was *Zaza the Mystic*, a two-issue run continued from *Charlie Chan*, which itself was an anomaly in 1955. Zaza the Mystic was, I believe, the only fortune teller ever to star in her own comic book. Acquiring both issues took psychic abilities of my own, I assure you. Try it! Did anyone buy this comic book?

Most of the Fawcett titles that Charlton inherited were either western or romance comics, and Charlton was a leader (in quantity at least) of both genres during the late 1950s and early 1960s. But one of the others from Fawcett was *Nyoka the Jungle Girl*, which originally enjoyed a 77-issue run ending in 1953

Nyoka appeared in 15 issues of her own Charlton title from 1954-57 (issues #8-#13 were technically entitled *Zoo Funnies* before the title became *Nyoka* for issues #14-#22). Some of the material was Fawcett reprints and some was original. What makes *Nyoka* interesting for the collector is that in those 15 Charlton issues, she never wore the same costume twice on the cover! Every single costume is different, and most of them look like an adult's version of what an attractive college girl would wear to a car wash!

If you line up all 15 covers of *Nyoka*, it makes a rather stunning study in editorial malfeasance. And in contrast to Atlas' Jann of the Jungle or Lorna the Jungle Girl, not to mention actress Irish McCalla's sensuous interpretation of Sheena (which was then popular on

The Many Genres of Charlton

From 1955-57 Charlton published comics covering an amazing assortment of genres... including:

- Golden Age Super Hero (Blue Beetle)
- Teen-age Super Hero (Nature Boy)
- Costumed Strongman (Mr. Muscles)
- Female Reporter (Brenda Starr)
- Classic Asian Detective (Charlie Chan)
- Classic English Detective (Sherlock Holmes)
- Scotland Yard Detective (Inspector Farnsworth of Scotland Yard)
- Firefighters (Danny Blaze)
- A Dog (Bo)
- Classic Sports Hero (Frank Merriwell)
- Frontier Fighter (Davy Crockett, Jim Bowie, Daniel Boone)
- Science Fiction Hero (Rocky Jones in Space Adventures, TV)
- Serial Naval Hero (Don Winslow)
- Hillbilly Humor (Hillbilly Comics)
- Teenage Auto Racers (Hot Rods and Racing Cars)
- Jungle "White-Hunter" Hero (Ramar, TV)
- Jungle Girl Heroine (Nyoka)
- Private Eye (Johnny Dynamite)
- Negro Romance (Negro Romance)
- Young Policeman (Rookie Cop)
- Newspaper Strip Adventure Hero (Terry & the Pirates)
- Prize Giveaways (Win-A-Prize Comics)
- Foreign Legionnaire (Captain Gallant, TV)
- Pirate (Long John Silver, TV)
- Fate (Tales of the Mysterious Traveler)
- Lawyer (Public Defender in Action)
- Robin Hood (Charlton's version)
- Indian Hero (Young Eagle)
- Fortune Teller (Zaza the Mystic)
- Revolutionary War Hero (Jerry Drummer)
- Horse Heroics (Black Fury)

And there were even more! Charlton also published numerous other comics devoted to western, romance, teen humor, kid humor, animal humor, mystery, science fiction and war themes.

television). Nyoka seems downright embarrassed to be swinging around

Speaking of embarrassments in the jungle, we have the king of televised potted palms, *Ramar of the Jungle*, which ran four issues under Charlton after first appearing as a licensed Toby title. The *Ramar* comic was decent enough, no better or worse than many of that sort, but the TV show was truly one of the worst ever done for children. If you ever get a chance to see one, don't hesitate. You'll laugh so hard you'll have tears in your eyes.

Charlton tried several other TV adaptations, including *Captain Gallant of the Foreign Legion* (a nifty show starring Buster Crabbe and his son, Cuffy), *Rocky Jones Space Ranger* (in *Space Adventures* #15-#18), and *Long John Silver*.

A BRIEF RETURN
***Blue Beetle* #18 (Feb 1955) Fox's Golden Age hero made a brief comeback with Charlton in 1954-55.**

They are all fondly remembered Grade Z children's TV shows, especially Rocky Jones. I thought one of the great things about having a last name with an "O" in it was that I could make the "O" an image of Saturn, just like Rocky himself did. Needless to say, my second-grade teacher was not amused, although I must admit my mother told me the teacher confessed it was a very creative way to sign my name! I never gave Rocky the credit he deserved

During the little flurry of super hero titles published in 1954-55, Charlton somehow acquired the rights to Blue Beetle from Fox, which last published him in 1950. (This is also how Charlton was able to revive Blue Beetle in 1964 during a much larger super hero flurry.)

Charlton put Blue Beetle in four issues of his own title (issues #18-#21) and two of *Space Adventures* (issues #13-#14), using a mixture of reprint and original material. Blue Beetle also appeared in *Nature Boy* #3 in 1956, which will enable you to win any number of bets about who was the second-to-last non-DC Golden Age super hero to appear (the last being Plastic Man, of course). At any rate, those six issues of Charlton's *Blue Beetle* represent the absolute nadir of super hero stories, art and reprint reproduction.

You've got to give Charlton credit for trying, though—for trying literally just about everything. Charlton even issued four issues of *Cowboy Love*, using lovely new covers and story reprints from the long-defunct Fawcett title. One can only guess the reaction of the readers.

Yet for romance collectors, those four *Cowboy Love* issues from Charlton are probably as scarce as any comics ever issued in the 1950s. One just as scarce, incidentally, is the single issue of *Negro Romance* that Charlton did in 1955 (Fawcett did three in 1950). The cover of the Charlton issue shows a man having his car filled with gas, saying "Fill 'er up buddy ... is there a hotel in this town? I like the scenery around here!" And the amply endowed woman he is staring at thinks to herself, "My he's handsome ... comes from the big city too!" And the Comics Code approved this! Horror was forbidden, but not rampant stupidity and stereotyping.

Charlton even flirted with newspaper comic heroes, with short-lived titles such as *Brenda Starr and Terry & the Pirates*.

So the next time anybody bugs you about collecting Charltons, just hand him or her a copy of *Mr. Muscles*. He's the non-super powered costumed character that Charlton tried for two issues instead of continuing with *Blue Beetle*. After all, anyone who can't appreciate a copy of *Mr. Muscles*, just won't appreciate Charlton, either! ■

Michelle Nolan is a nationally recognized collector and researcher of comic books from the '40s through the '60s. She has one of the most extensive collections of 1950's comic books in the United States.

Atom
#1 VG+ $200
#7 FN- $85

Atom & Hawkman
#39 FN $10
#40 FN+ $12
#41 VF+ $22
#42 VF/NM $25
#43 VF/NM $25
#45 VF/NM $25

Batman
#99 FN/VF $175
#110 FN/VF $175
#155 VG/FN $95
#171 VG/FN $125
#198 VF/NM $65

Beware Creeper
#1 VF/NM $45

Brave & Bold
#17 VF- $230
#51 VF- $125

Doom Patrol
#86 VG+ $25

Flash
#117 FN/VF $110
#118 FN/VF $85
#119 FN $60
#137 VG $90
#175 VF+ $85

Forever People
#1 VF/NM $45

Green Lantern
#40 FN- $150
#59 VF- $115

Hawkman
#1 FN+ $175
#5 VF- $55
#7 NM- $75

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#82 FN $17

House Of Secrets
#61 F/VF $75

Jimmy Olsen
#49 VF $55

Justice League Of America
#9 FN/VF $180
#11 FN+ $65

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#13 FN/VF $100
#16 VF+ $175
#80 FN- $90

Mystery In Space
#9 VG+ $115
#22 FN/VF $135
#32 VF- $145
#41 FN+ $65
#54 FN/VF $175
#58 VF- $140
#60 FN $55
#69 FN/VF $60
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#12 VF+ $50
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#26 FN+ $90
#34 VF $750
#55 VF+ $185
#60 VF+ $180
#64 FN+ $45

Spectre
#1 FN $35

Star Spangled War Stories
#90 FN $160

Strange Adventures
#12 VF- $325
#13 VF- $225
#16 VF/NM $450
#20 FN/VF $225
#21 VF+ $245
#22 FN+ $150
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Superman
#199 FN/VF $95

Swamp Thing
#1 VF+ $50
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Dell Four Color
#437 VF- $80
#982 FN $65

Doc Savage
#1 VF+ (Gold Key) $48

Doctor Solar
#1 VF- $200
#3 VF/NM $55
#5 VF $45
#10 VF+ $30
#13 VF $24
#21 VF $16

Magnus, Robot Fighter
#14 VF+ (Gold Key) $35
#24 VF (Gold Key) $22
#25 VF/NM (Gold Key) $26

Mighty Sampson
#3 VF- $10
#6 VF $9
#7 VF+ $10
#8 VF/NM $12
#9 VF+ $10
#10 VF- $9
#11 VF+ $8
#12 VF/NM $10
#13 VF/NM $10
#15 NM- $11
#17 NM- $11

Phantom
#7 VF $20
#12 NM- $25

Space Family Robinson
#2 VF/NM $80
#5 VF/NM $40
#11 VF+ $22
#12 VF+ $22
#13 NM- $30
#14 VF $20
#15 VF+ $22
#16 VF- $18
#22 VF+ $13

Star Trek
#2 VG/FN (Gold Key) $85

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Doom Patrol (Cont.)
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#1 VF/NM (White Mtn. Copy) $500

Hawkman
#1 VF+ (White Mtn. Copy) $600

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#3 NM+ (White Mtn. Copy).....$120
#4 VF/NM (White Mtn. Copy) $90
#5 VF- (White Mtn. Copy).....$60
#6 VF+ (White Mtn. Copy) $40
#7 VF+ (White Mtn. Copy) $40
#8 NM- (White Mtn. Copy) $70
#10 VF+ (White Mtn. Copy) $40
#11 VF/NM (White Mtn. Copy) $40
#12 NM (White Mtn. Copy).....$45
#14 VF/NM (White Mtn. Copy) $40
#16 NM (White Mtn. Copy).....$45
#22 VF (White Mtn. Copy) $20
#24 NM- (White Mtn. Copy) $35
#27 FN/VF (White Mtn. Copy).....$25

My Greatest Adventure
#78 VF/NM (White Mtn. Copy) $30

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#32 VF- (Salida Copy).....$60

Showcvase
#38 FN (White Mtn. Copy).....$135
#39 FN- (White Mtn. Copy).....$95
#40 VF/NM (White Mtn. Copy) $400

Captain America
#104 NM (White Mtn. Copy).....$50

Iron Man
#4 VF+ (White Mtn. Copy) $40

Amazing Spider-Man
#122 VF/NM $120

Avengers
#14 VF/NM $80

Daredevil
#5 VF+ $120

Doctor Strange
#169 VF/NM $150

Fantastic Four
#35 VF- $45
#47 VF- $32
#52 VF- $45
#53 VF- $35

Giant Size X-Men
#1 FN- $130

Incredible Hulk
#180 NM $75
#181 VG/FN $110
#182 NM $60

Iron Fist
#14 VF+ $125

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#54 VG $20
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Marvel Super Heroes
#13 VF- $35

Marvel Tales
#1 FN/VF $135
#2 VF/NM $75

Nick Fury
#1 .....$35

Silver Surfer
#1 NM- $475
#2 NM $175
#3 VF+ $95
#4 VF+ $300
#5 NM $90
#6 VF $52
#7 VF/NM $65
#8 VF- $38
#9 NM- $65
#10 NM- $65
#11 VF/NM $40
#12 NM $50
#13 VF/NM $40
#14 VF+ $60
#15 NM $50
#16 VF/NM $40
#17 VF $30
#18 VF/NM $45

Spectacular. Spider-Man Magazine
#1 NM- $60
#2 NM+ $115

Strange Tales
#113 VF+ $65
#114 VF- $190
#115 VF- $270

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Artist, Author, & Publisher!

L. B. COLE

Interviewed by Scotty Moore

●●●●●

Creator of more than 1500 covers, brilliant wildlife artist, expert on human and animal anatomy, and pioneering comic book publisher... Leonard Cole is a living legend!

I HAVE ALWAYS WANTED TO DO AN INTERVIEW WITH Leonard Brandt (L. B.) Cole. Truly one of the giants of the comic book industry as artist, writer, publisher; his vision helped to mold the image of comic books in the 1940's and 1950's. Mr. Cole was gracious enough to take time out of his hectic schedule to spend a few hours on the phone in discussion of his life and times... both during the comic book days and afterward.

Scott Moore: *You have previously stated that you came to Continental in 1942 as editor and art director, your first sustained period in the comic business. How did that come about?*

Leonard B. Cole: When I went there I had been doing a lot of freelance comic book work. I started work on Don Winslow and the Flash and Lash Lightning back in 1939. By 1942, when I became art editor and director and joined the company, it was called Et-Es-Go. That stood for Temerson's sisters, Etta, Esther, and Goldie. Then we changed to Continental. It was a much better name.

Moore: *Did you actually approach Temerson?*

Cole: He came to me, having seen some of my work. I had not even thought of comics per se. I was art director at Consolidated Lithographing and did a lot of work for most of the liquor labels and the cigar bands in the country at that time. I was working at that time to see where I could invest some money in the business, because I had made quite a bit of it in advertising. But you don't let the money go, you want to get in as cheaply as you can. In any event that is how I got to Continental.

Moore: *When you came to Continental I assume that the* Suspense *and* Terrific *titles had not yet been generated.*

Cole: That's right.

Moore: *Were those titles and the other Continental titles your idea?*

Cole: Basically all of the creative ideas were mine. We started *Suspense, Contact,* ... yes. All of them were my ideas except those that had already been there. *The Catman* title had already started... but it was falling apart..

Moore: *Did you script any material or did you hire writers to do that for you?*

Cole: Oh no, as a matter of fact that was one the confessions of our "success" in all of our businesses. We paid people up front and we got some of the greatest talents in the business. As the years went on we were using Mickey Spillane, who at that time was not very well known, we were getting people away from their companies that they working for. Other companies made them wait for a month for their pay. We paid them up front, so we had almost anybody we wanted, anybody. These (stories) were all created by them except for the cover ideas. I had no problems with the covers because I did not have to show them to anybody for approval.

Moore: *Did you have any writers at the time that were particular favorites?*

Cole: Yes, Burt Hirschfeld. I think you might know him, he was a very famous book author. Evan Hunter, he was doing Black Board

Jungle at the time and we were paying him so that he could live until he got paid for the book. We also had a fellow named Jack Grogan, a magnificent author

Moore: *How did you approach the solicitation of artists to work on the packages for you?*

Cole: Actually word of mouth started it because in those days a lot of the boys were in the service and we had to look for new art. Of course the newspaper ads, like in the New York Times, we were inundated with the good, bad and indifferent illustrators. We culled from there and we got quite a good bunch of people.

Moore: *I imagine as art director that was specifically your selection?*

Cole: As a matter of fact, that was one of the prerequisites, if I worked servicing any account. We actually never had to show it to anybody. When I say we, I mean my company. We had complete control, editorial, art, and what have you.

Moore: *Was your wife involved in the business at this point?*

Cole: At this point, just towards the middle of the time we were with Continental she became involved. We were hard pressed to get letterers , particularly, and editors because we were doing a book every calendar day. Basically, we were turning out 365 books a year.

She was and is a very brilliant lady, at that time she edited every piece of copy that came out of the company. Well, she started to practice what was called thick and thin lettering. It was not but about a month that she became so adept at it that she was producing about 20-30 pages a day, maybe more. Literally the best lettering that I have seen, but of course I am a bit prejudiced. However everybody said that her lettering was about as good as it ever gets. She also oversaw the lettering that we had to buy from other outside help.

Moore: *It sounds like it was definitely a joint success. That is wonderful and unusual when you can develop that kind of partnership within a marriage. And other family members?*

Cole: Oh yes. We have a daughter who is an extremely successful business woman as well. She owns her own business. And we have a 27 year old grandson who is an electrical engineer. Everything worked out fine.

Moore: *When you had the stories written or scripted, did you assist the artists by giving them rough layouts?*

Cole: On occasion. Fellows like George Evans and Bob Fujitani were pros that we didn't need to supply with anything. If I thought any changes in the pencils were needed, I'd suggest it to them.

Moore: *Did they get the pencils approved before they did the inks?*

Cole: Yes. Usually that approach was by mutual agreement, because they said "if this does not work we don't want it to be our fault." That was standard procedure. It wasn't a practice that we forced on them.

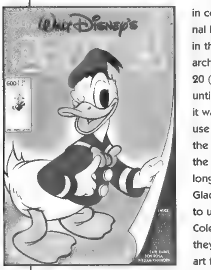
Moore: *Did you help them with research?*

Cole: I always gave them references... any reference I could; supply that would support the story they were doing. I have a 22,000 piece cross indexed picture file here. If they needed a reference they could use it... provided that they brought it back when they were finished. If they didn't they were in big trouble. Besides the picture file, we keep a

IT'S AMAZING BUT...

COLE DREW DISNEY!

The cover for *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories* #600 is a recreation of a recreation of the original cover of *WDC&S* #1. In the mid-seventies, Bruce Hamilton commissioned the legendary L.B. Cole to recreate the cover in color. That original has languished in the Hamilton archives for the last 20 (or so) years until recently when it was selected for use as the cover of the 600th issue. As the original was long lost, Gladstone decided to use the L. B. Cole version. But they needed line art for separation and the Cole cover is a full color painting. So they asked talented Gladstone staffer Sarah Flanagan to help. She painstakingly used tracing paper, brush, and ink to transform the painting into line art.



PREVIOUS PAGE a close-up of L.B. Cole's famous rendition of the devil from *Mask Comics* #2 (Apr/May 1945).

© RURAL HOME PUBS

Ghostly Weird #124 (Sep 1954).

© STAR PUBLICATIONS

vast pictorial book library as well.

Moore: *I understand that you had a close friendship with Harvey Kurtzman, a notoriously fine researcher.*

Cole: He was like a baby when we picked him up. My wife and I took care of him from the time he started in the business.

Moore: *I understand that both of you had research requirements and research files that are legendary. Who was your distributor at that time?*

Cole: One at that time, there was PDC (Publishers Distributing Company) . Later on (at Star) we had Kable News, we had American News Company... we had Ace. We were lucky because every distributor in the business wanted our books because later on when competition was tough our books were selling for some reason.

Moore: *Were you satisfied with the distribution efforts of PDC at that time?*

Cole: At that time yes.

Moore: *Continental books published from about 1943 on are among some of the most difficult books to find today. Do you think that could be a related to distribution?*

Cole: They were out there but I can't find them today either. I cannot find a mint condition book anywhere. It's funny... every time a guy did the book we used to give him a half a dozen copies, and now I don't have any of them. I do not have one copy of my books. What I do have (and probably much more valuable than the books) are press proofs of the covers. Proofs of perhaps 340 of the 1500 covers I have done... Cover proofs, yes, but no books.

Moore: *There was a* Suspense Comics *#13 planned. Do you recall that?*

Cole: Actually that was originally planned for *Suspense* #1 and was never published. It was then supposed to go on the end, after *Suspense* #12, but the run was discontinued by then.

Moore: *Why was Suspense discontinued?*

Cole: Continental failed in total, I presume, because the war was over and other things were going on which were much more profitable, it was purely a case of economics.

Moore: *Perhaps the business was still profitable but not as profitable as other opportunities?*

Cole: Exactly, you phrased it very well. We went on to bigger and better things which required much less effort.

Moore: *Do have any idea what kind of numbers the print runs were for these books at Continental?*

Cole: Continental started at 175,000 and went up to one million. This was war time, so if you had the paper and printed it, it was sold. We're talking about 900,000, a million, no returns what so ever. We also had a return market whereby the returned copies were sold at a minimal price at about $17 dollars per thousand ,which was more than we had to pay for them and less than they would have to buy them for so it was a mutual agreement that worked well.

Moore: *I understand that during the war comic books were so popular that some local distributors would lie about their "spoilage rates", tear the covers off the books, returning the covers for the "unsold copies refund" and then sell the coverless books.*

Cole: They did that all the time and they were called stripped copies. They would send back the cover, you know - stripped, but they would sell the book, the insides, as damaged copies. They would get more that way than they could through distributing it on the news stands. Sure, that's what was happening all the time, but everybody was happy because everybody was still making money.

Moore: *You were, especially during your Star days, a self publisher. I assume that you retained rights and actually retained physical control of all the material that was printed. So where is the original artwork for the books?*

Cole: The artwork for Star was sold. It was sold when we went out of the comic book business, and that is where the Holyoke name comes in. What happened was I had a partner, Jerry Kramer, who passed away in 1956, believe it

or not, of lung cancer and never smoked a cigarette or cigar or pipe in his life. When he passed away his wife had no interest in selling his half of the business to me, absolutely no interest. As a matter of fact she denigrated the whole thought of comics.

Moore: *Would you have wanted to stay with Star if she had done so?*

Cole: Of course, it was a successful business. So what happened was that the word went out that we were for sale and we sold the business to a gentleman who went into partnership with one of the distributor's sons, who shall have to remain nameless. They in turn then sold all plates, mats, artwork, etc.. to Holyoke who were our printers. Holyoke Magazines were in Holyoke Mass., they were the printers of the books.

Moore: *What became of all the material that was produced for Et-Es-Go and Continental?.*

Cole: Well I don't know what they did with the work because when we finished up I had literally sold my interest in the business, I'm not sure what they did with it. Rae Herman, who was Temerson's secretary, went into Orbit publishing and produced her own books. I think she bought some of it, I'm not sure but I believe that is what happened to some of it

Moore: *On the art collecting side, there are a total of seven covers that were done by you that are known to still be in existence, and those were done at the tail end of the Curtis runs (about 1949). One is a Dick Cole, one is a* Target *cover, one is a FourMost cover. But the material from Continental and the material from Star as far as actual physical artwork, as far as I know, has never been seen.*

Cole: I really don't know. I still own the rights to a lot of that and I can't find it. I still would like to know who has got it and, I was never paid for it . Somebody has probably stored it thinking someday it will be worth something, and lo and behold it is. Money is not the object here but I get the sense of abuse, they used me. Some guy, maybe some delivery boy might have taken it ... I don't know where it is. I had some work from other people, from other publishers that I had done, that I had stored in a brand new basement and it was lost in a flood. That hurt. Along with some other people's work. I had a few good pieces, but they are gone so I don't think about it.

Moore: *Were you ever called to testify before the congressional hearings in the mid '50s?*

Cole: Was I ever... and how! I don't know if you read the story about the interview I had with a Senator in the Roosevelt Hotel, or was it the Commodore? I had an interview with him and in his most wondrous southern accent he said "I'm against this and that and the other thing" and then I said "you mean incest, murder, and this that and the other thing," and he said "exactly". I produced the Bible, I produced Shakespeare, I produced about four pieces that are required reading for schools. I listed them verbatim. He turned red and he stumbled and fumbled and that was the end of it. Everything is bad that they don't approve of. So what happened then was I quoted chapter and verse from the Bible and required readings from the schools. I didn't add or detract a word, everything I gave them was verbatim from these classics.

Moore: *Starting with the later* Catman *issues, the* Mask Comics, *and then later on with the work you did at Star, you applied your theories about coloring and aimed for real newsstand impact.*

Cole: That's what we called the poster color cover.

Moore: *It strikes me that your material is, in a way, what later would be described as "psychedelic."*

Cole: The critical thing was time and the first idea that came to me that could be developed. I did it, I didn't have to show it to anybody for approval. I imagine if there were illustrators today that were not constrained by editors who had to justify their jobs, they would produce covers like this.

Moore: *An early example is the* Mask *#1 cover where you have the moths drawn to the flame of evil.*

Cole: That to me was a thought that came because what could be better against a black cover, which was my concept of being able to "put a hole" in the comic book stands. You wouldn't see anything there per se, and what

L. B. Cole, Rae Herman, and Jack Grogan looking through the latest issue of *Captain Aero Comics* (#14) during early 1944. Photo taken by Sheldon Levens, New York, New York at the ET-ES-GO/ Continental offices.

would be better than a bunch of color against a flame of some sort and of course it evolved into that

Moore: *Did you have any trepidation, because it just seems to me that it was so new and so exciting for the time?*

Cole: No, I had no trepidation, as a matter of fact I had great expectations. And it sure as heck worked.

Moore: *Even today I don't think that material has ever really been duplicated.*

Cole: Thank you. I don't think it has either. What's happening today is a tragedy, and I mean it. Because there are some great illustrators out there, I'm talking about technical illustrators who can draw anything and they insist upon putting, on the better by 40 different colors, everything on the cover. If the muscles are big I'll make mine bigger and I'll punch harder, and I'll put less clothing on the ladies. It just crowds up, its like one bunch of people running around, and that's about it. There's no character to them. If you put a cover out today, just a solid black cover with a little butterfly in the middle of it, it would sell. The eye will go to that on the news stand, which of course is also the key to sales.

Moore: Catman *was obviously a hero title, but I noticed that you had a couple of continuing characters like Kid Terrific and Mr. Nobody. Even so, it appears you weren't terribly interested in getting into the hero material per se.*

Cole: Absolutely not, because everybody else was doing it. What we were doing first and foremost was to get them see the cover, then get them pick up the book, open the book, strum through, it and if anything in there piqued their interest, a sale.

Moore: *The first three issues of* Suspense *did not utilize your covers. First was Charles Quinlan.*

Cole: That was before I even came over to Continental, Quinlan was there and when I came in and took over part of the company, he left. He was tired, anyway, the poor man… he really was. Charlie worked so hard drawing that he had problems. He was a fine artist but very stubborn guy. Lovely man but stubborn.

Moore: *Nina Albright did the cover to number two. Do you have any recollections of her at all?*

Cole: Very much so. She was a cat lover by the way and a very lovely lady who lived on the east side of New York, at 80 something I think. Blond, wore glasses, very gentle, very nice. There were three or four lady illustrators that we used… Ann Brewster was another one. One other one, Pauline Sullivan, was a tragedy. She was working for me at Classics. She didn't show up with her stuff and lo and behold we found out she passed away on the train of a heart attack, a young lady. Yes, I mean it was one of those terrible things...

Moore: *Was that unusual at the time to have that many women working in a company like that?*

Cole: As a matter of fact, I don't know … because I didn't check out the others… but there weren't too many lady illustrators. As a matter of fact we attracted artists like a moth around a flame because we paid so well up front. In those days we paid sixteen dollars a page and then it went to twenty five. We paid twenty five when sixteen was the norm.

We were the first ones to really hire any African American talent. In the middle of the war we had a Japanese genius working for us, Bob Fujitani, a really wonderful artist,.

AN EXTREMELY RARE AND HISTORICALLY IMPORTANT photo of The staff of Et-Es-Go/ Continental in 1944. First row, left to right. Chris Schaare, Mark Bogardo, Frank Temerson, George Harrison, Jack Alderman, L.B. Cole, Jack Grogan, Charles Quinlan, Second row, left to right: Lucy Feller, and Rae Herman.

Moore: *Did Bob have any problems during the war because of his background?*

Cole: I guess he might have, but not with us. He was a very handsome young man. He signed his name Fuje, by the way He was a really giant illustrator. His black and white, his shadow, and his definition was so beautiful.

Moore: *How did your association start with Alex Schomburg?*

Cole: I don't think I ever met Alex.. I understand he is a lovely guy.

Moore: *Did Alex get the assignment and have the art-work brought in?*

Cole: Yes. Not that I didn't want to meet him… I loved his stuff. Some of the stuff that we used had been done before I got there. They used to do it on spec, and then somebody would sell it to us. This is not as cut and dried as you might think.

Moore: *Alex did a cover which eventually was printed as the cover to* Suspense *#3. I had heard that it was initially done for the* Terrific *title because it actually showed Kid Terrific on the cover.*

Cole: That might have been done during the transfer of the artwork and editorial assignments. I'm not sure.

Moore: *What was Harvey Kurtzman like?*

Cole: Harvey was a doll, my wife and I practically brought him up. We worked the studio, run by a fellow named Lou Ferstadt. Lou had a studio and we took space there. He was working a lot of stuff for Fawcett… and Harvey and I would pencil and ink for them, again for a piece of the action. But to get paid Louis would take a story into Fawcett, get a check, go to the bank and cash it and pay us in cash.

Moore: *So you were working with Harvey at the time?*

Cole: Yes we were working together. Harvey went into the service, and when he came out he did some work for me. And then he said "hey, I've got a great idea", too bad he didn't show to me, he showed it to Bill Gaines I said what are friends for, friends like that I don't need. They got MAD so that was the end of it. But we kept seeing Harvey all the time.

Last time I saw him was at a convention in the Biltmore Hotel. In the lobby I felt someone turn around and grab me by the neck and kiss me on the back of the neck. I thought it was a woman, I turned around and it was Harvey. There were fourteen comic aficionados sitting there with their mouths open, "Harvey Kurtzman kissed L. B. Cole"!

Moore: *That sounds like Harvey!*

Cole: Yes, that's him. We lived together practically, we used to eat our dinners in the Hommand Hardadt on 45th street at three in the morning because we really worked around the clock. We turned out tremendous amounts, we were animating, lettering, inking, and pencils, inking this and enjoying that, the whole thing. He was very, very organized, and a sense of humor you could never forget.

Moore: *And a wonderful story teller too?*

Cole: Oh what a story teller… yes!

Moore: *Many feel that the war stories that he did in the early fifties (for EC) are the best war stories ever done.*

Cole: Yes, aren't they! Anyway, he was one of the geniuses A quick anecdote about Harvey. He never smoked, never drank, never did drugs, anything. I get a call from him one night, and he says "Len I'm about as high as I've ever been". I said "Harvey, you? What happened?" He said "I'm calling to you from the Playboy plane and we're flying to San Diego". He called me up , he had to talk to me he was so proud of it.

L.B. Cole at the helm of Dell Comics after the take-over from Western Publishing.

***Blue Bolt* #110 (Aug 1950) featuring one of the more classic and collectible L.B. Cole covers.**

Moore: *What have you been doing lately?*

Cole: Lately I have been recovering from a right leg amputation. But what we have been doing, as far as work is concerned, publishing and illustrating anatomy and physiology text books. I had a medical background so I was able to do that.

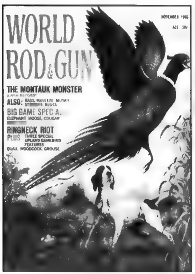
Moore: *I understand you have a doctorate in physiology?*

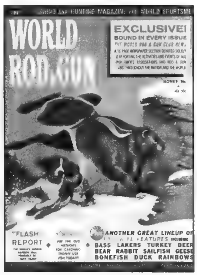
Cole: Yes, anatomy and physiology. When I first got into illustrating I was enchanted with animals, nature, and in school dissection used to drive me crazy. I said to myself "well maybe I'll illustrate them instead." I started illustrating and they worked out pretty well, as a matter of fact we sold an awful lot of my stuff. Rather than trying to go into veterinary medicine where there was no money, I was getting more money for an illustration than I was for treating a herd of dairy cattle… so I thought "this is the thing to do." So I worked on it, went to the University of Berlin, got my degree and that's how it started.

Moore: *Do you have the* Gerber's Photo Journal Guide to Comics*?*

Cole: Yes I do, I have them both.

Moore: *Did you ever count the covers that are on*





EXTREMELY RARE high grade copies of L.B. Cole's World Rod & Gun Magazine (#1, Nov 1956, left; and #2, Dec 1956). COURTESY THE PHIL BARNHART COLLECTION

Facing page **3 YEAR OLD "PIRATE PICKLES"** was the inspiration for the cover art on Classics Comics' The Illustrated Story of Horses.

the dust jackets to those books, your work is number one by count.

Cole: Yes, I know I saw that. As a matter of fact when Gerber sent out the promotional material one whole back piece was all of my covers, I think Blue Bolt Weird, Mask, and what have you. I was very flattered.

Moore: *And I think its very deserving too.*

Cole: I think of what I was doing and I'm still yawning. What a job. But I used to do two three , four covers at a time, I'd give a common color at one spot, I would do the same sizes sometimes. I would be able to cut the bottom of one to cut into the top of the other and left and right, so I'd get four covers on a sheet and the printer loved it. The engravers, at that time there were engravers, not offset. They loved it because it was just one common color, then when they trimmed them they were four different books. We had to do it at that time, because labor costs were so high.

Moore: *Did you ever take a day off?*

Cole: What's that? Oh, you were allowed to do that? The worst thing you can ever possibly do is work for yourself, you feel guilty when you take the day off.

Moore: *How did you end up at Gilberton?*

Cole: Gilberton was *Classics Illustrated*. I got a call from them. A fellow named Norman Nodell, who was an elegant illustrator by the way, he said "You know , Len, I understand they're looking for an art director, and I said "Norm I don't work for anybody I work with them". I gave Mike Kaplan, the editor, a call. He said "Come on down" Everything worked out well and I went to Gilberton. We started to update some of the books, new covers on old stuff. That was, I tell you, the most circuitous publishing company, for lack of a better word. I could never tell, and I was the art director at the time, what book we were doing at any particular time.

Moore: *I always wondered about that. I know there are a couple of covers that are identified as being your work, and it seems to me that I see your work in a lot of those covers… but there not signed by you.*

Cole: That right, the only one that I actually signed, because I insisted upon it, was the *World Around Us Horses*, and that happens to be the only original piece of cover art that I've got left. I have that cover art.

Moore: *There is another cover you did that has a large black horse on it… its not signed by you but is attributed to you.*

Cole: Yes, *Black Beauty*. I did that. I also did *The Moon Stone*, as a matter of fact the original cover is owned by Bruce Hamilton. He bought it from somebody, I don't know who, and it was broken in shipment, cracked down the middle, not completely busted but there was a big scar right down the middle. He came to New York and said "Len can you fix it, I'll pay you for it", and I said "you don't have to pay me", and I refurbished it and gave it back to him and he's got it.

Moore: *I noticed that you really collected top flight people at Gilberton, such as Reed Crandall, Angelo Torres, and even Norman Saunders.*

Cole: That's right, Norm Saunders too. How about Jack Kirby, did you know that he and I have the same birthday? August 28th 1917, he was born one year before me. He passed away just recently. He worked for me, and so did Wally Wood, now we're talking giants of the industry but when they were doing books for me they weren't giants yet, they were still developing.

Moore: *Was this at Star or at Gilberton?*

Cole: Star.

Moore: *Did you leave Gilberton simply because some of those projects were winding up or was it because of a new opportunity.*

Cole: Purely money.

Moore: *Purely money?*

Cole: Yes. The comics business was getting a little harder with the distributors and the returns and what have you. Then all of a sudden we found like there were hundreds and hundreds of books coming in from the competition, so why fight that when there's an empty field.

There was *Field and Stream*, *Outdoor Life*, and *Sports Afield*, just three magazines, and *Sports Afield* asked me to come down, first time and do it for them, as the editor. I said no, I'd rather not. So I started my own, with a fellow named Pete Kaplan. Pete was one of my partners.

The actual title started with Arthur Bernhardt, and I did two or three copies with him and then decided to buy the title out, then I published it. Those original covers I have, and people seem to want to buy those originals, as an investment, more than anything I have ever done. The value of comic art pales into insignificance when you hear about what people want to pay for these things. That's

investors now, the Japanese, the Swiss, the Arabs. My concern is I want to sell them right here if I ever sell them. Right here in this country.

Moore: *I can understand the appeal. From an aesthetic point of view they're beautiful.*

Cole: I enjoy doing them. That's maybe why I think they look as good as they do.

Moore: *With your interest in natural subjects,* Rod and Gun Magazine *must have been a real exciting project for you.*

Cole: That was the greatest pleasure of my life.

Moore: *I know you were really having to work overtime and late hours in order to get your material out...*

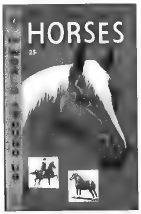
Cole: It was an avocation.

Moore: *It seems to me that you put more into the product than commercially you needed to do.*

Cole: Absolutely, absolutely. Maybe it was ego but I wanted to do it right. Sometimes I had to rush when we had to meet a deadline and we could do a couple of quick covers overnight. I would do my own, there being no copying machines in those days. We used Photostats, we used the mat Photostat and I'd color them and send them along as a guide for the engravers, and I did two a night.

Moore: *Did you have a good relationship with your engravers, because it seems to me that the colors you were trying to get in your covers really showed up pretty well.*

Cole: The best, because again, we paid them up front, that's really the common denominator for services. Give them money and they did a magnificent job for us.



Moore: *Some of the work that you did for Star, including* Thrilling Crime *and some of the horror titles, is really superlative work!*

Cole: I feel like the jungle covers were some of my best too.

Moore: *Yes,* Terror of The Jungle *and so forth...*

Many collectors and fans wish you had been able to continue with the Star material for a little while.

Cole: That goes double for me too, but again regrettably sales weren't there after the Korean War...

Moore: *Do you have any feelings in general about your career at this point. Do you feel that you have been able to do what you wanted to do?*

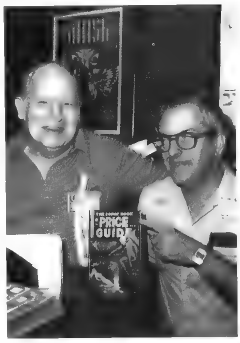
Cole: I don't think anybody ever does, there's always something buzzing around in your head that you would love to do...

Moore: *Is there something that you would have liked to have done that you have not done?*

Cole: I'm doing what I wanted to do just now. I'm working on what I call the Penciled West. I'm doing western illustrations in pencil like Remington was doing, and they're turning out pretty sensational, even if I do say so myself. The galleries in New York want them and now you're talking about foreign collectors... they are out of their mind over the American West. I just did a series of black and white pencil sketches for preliminary stuff and I already received an offer for those.

Moore: *Are these penciled pieces going to be commissioned pieces or are you going to be publishing them yourself?*

Cole: I'm not publishing them at all. These are originals, one of a kind. If people want them, I'll sell them. I may eventually put them together in a book, but that's not what I have in mind right now. These are black and white illustrations and I have some color illustrations, all in pencil, pretty effective if I do say so myself, really effective. I have about 75 in mind already and I have completed fourteen of them. I'm guess I'm going to have to do some careful thinking about who gets what... several collectors and dealers have already asked to see them



L.B. Cole and Bob Overstreet at the 1981 San Diego Comic Book Convention. Bob is pointing to *Comic Book Price Guide* #11 which showcased L.B. Cole.

Moore: *What do you consider your favorite comic book cover?*

Cole: I would say *Mask* #2. That and there's a jungle cover that my daughter posed for believe it or not. *Terrors of the Jungle* #21

Moore: *Is that one that you did a recreation for?*

Cole: That's one of the recreations I did. I like those types of covers because they're almost posters, they don't tell any great story but they sure as heck sell books. I've got a lot of romance covers that I also like.

Moore: *It seems like there is no romance genre anymore?*

Cole: There's a big market waiting for somebody. If I were in comics again that's what I would do.

Moore: *I think that you and Joe Simon proved in the late forties and early fifties that romance sells.*

Cole: And how they sell! True to *Life Romances* was one of our largest sellers. I think *Modern Romance* for Simon and Kirby was probably the biggest money maker ever. You could put them out for $2.00, $2.50 a piece in comic book form today, thirty two pages in full color and you'd sell a trillion of them.

ELLEN COLE with then Vice President Nelson Rockefeller. The Vice President assisted the Coles in producing films for the Electrical Industry.

Moore: *You would bring more women into the stores too.*

Cole: Exactly, exactly. Somebody should really do it. I would edit a book like that, I would design covers like that if there was the opportunity, that would be something that I have great faith in. People would go into the stores and buy them.

Moore: *Speaking of genres, it seems that very early on you started giving hints of horrific material in your covers. People point to the Eerie publication by Avon in the late forties as the first "modern horror cover". But I look at some of the later* Suspense *covers you did as having elements of horror in them. The cover that you did for* Suspense *#8 which has the spider, and the #12 which has the hanging effigy coming out of the cuckoo clock, and the* Mask *title are clearly "horror" per se'. That was in the mid forties… you put material on covers that the rest of the industry wouldn't catch up to for about five or six years.*

Cole: Others were very stubborn about it because they had editors who had to justify their jobs, their biggest claim to fame and fortune would be to say no to an idea. Nobody had any creative ideas because they were afraid to stick their necks out, its much easier to say this won't sell because they would be right more often than wrong.

Again, I had the great advantage of not having to show it to anyone so I could take a shot at it. You see that I was virtually the first one to do a black cover, black background cover, and it sold like crazy. Two or three covers, and finally the industry woke up and they all put out black covers. Then I put out one in color so I was the only one, my books were the only ones that stood out on the stands for long.

Moore: *Of course after two of three years of proving that you were right it wouldn't be very hard for an editor to come along and say lets do that because someone else made money doing it.*

Cole: Exactly, exactly.

Moore: *Did you find that the dynamic red covers were as interesting on the stands as the black covers?*

Cole: There were three colors that I found most salable… black, white, and red. Keep your backgrounds simple, keep your cover subjects simple, even though it looks like there's a lot going on. If you analyze it, its all composed towards a central point. Guns would be shooting, all the bullets would be going to one spot like a target. I had to go to one point, even on the price guide (*Overstreet Price Guide* #11)… the bats are coming out of a castle but they're coming up to one spot and he's (the devil) pointing to it.

Moore: *It seems like if that lesson was never learned by today's publishers. In fact, it seems to have been un-learned by the industry!*

Cole: Exactly! I find the covers to the books today confusing, your eye drifts over them quickly because there is nothing to capture you. That's beautiful art by the way, I mean its nicely drawn, but my god so much is going on. You get a guy with deltoid muscles and biceps and triceps, they put quadriceps on and then they add muscles on top of that, they want the biggest, strongest, and it gets so damn confusing. They're punching each other you know, but how hard can you hit somebody? They won't stop, they just won't stop.

L. B. AND ELLEN Cole posing with an L.B. Cole original painting at the 1981 Oklahoma Multicon. The painting was used on the cover of the Multicon'81 program booklet, and originally commissioned by fan and collector Ike Wilson.

Moore: *Well, Mr. Cole, this has been an exciting and rewarding morning for us. It seems we've gone from the very beginnings into today and then back again. Thank you for your insights, memories, and your time.*

Cole: It's been a pleasure. ■

L.B. Cole's Sci-Fi

BY MATT NELSON

The name instantly causes one's imagination to run rampant through a vast multitude of colorful comic book covers... covers which are splashed with a blinding array of red, green, and yellow colors against black and white backgrounds. The name L.B. Cole not only means quality art and collector interest .. it also means productivity! That's because he was responsible for over 1,500 comic book covers published during the '40s and '50s! There's nary a single serious collector of ephemera from these two decades that does not count an L.B. Cole cover as an absolute "necessity" for their collection. And if you don't believe it, then witness firsthand the awesome power of L.B. Cole's artistic talent here in this issue! Amazingly, EVERY genre has its share of Cole comics.. superhero, crime, western, romance, mystery, humor, funny animal... you name it. But it's his horror and science fiction covers that collectors covet and seek out most!

Strangely enough, three of Cole's best sci fi covers appear at the tail end of non-sci fi titles. *Contact* #12, *Captain Aero* #26, and *Captain Flight* #11 were the last issues of those three adventure-oriented titles. Prior to these three final issues each title sported covers of their lead feature's character, or WWII planes locked in a deadly dogfight. Apparently, Cole decided to step off into the fast-approaching genre of science fiction to design the covers of these last three issues. The result is what many collectors and historians believe are THE definitive L.B. Cole sci fi covers of his entire career! Combining the single background color theme (evident on his earlier *Suspense* covers) with his use of explosive primary colors (as seen on his future covers of *Blue Bolt Weird Tales*), Cole created the perfect newsstand attention getters as well as classic popular art! The busy, yet simplistic cover art displayed on *Contact* #12, *Captain Aero* #26, and *Captain Flight* #11 covers can be explained by Cole's method of drawing reader's attention to his books on the newsstand at the time.

In Cole's own words: "A rather simple solution occurred to me one day while passing a magazine dealer who carried virtually every one of the hundreds of titles being published at that time. My thought upon viewing this riot of color confronting me was what would happen should a blank space seem to appear by virtue of a cover, predominantly black, being placed amidst this kaleidoscope of brilliance? The results were astounding."

Indeed, they were. Cole's approach to comic book covers involving this method resulted in successful sales that were unparalleled by competitor's books during that period. *Mask* #2 sold over 1,000,000 copies on the newsstands, with its amazing cover earning much of the credit!

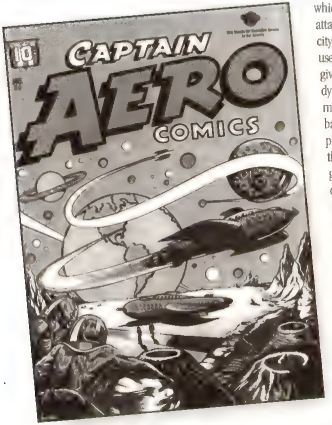
I think Cole's successful career as a comic book artist can be classified into two recognizable periods. The first style is clean and solid, with the use of primary colors against a solid one-color background. Examples of this style can be seen on Cole's covers of *Suspense*. The second style consists of a blinding array of colors and very dynamic scenes. Examples of this style can be seen on Cole's covers of *Thrilling Crime Cases* or *Blue Bolt Weird Tales*. I feel that *Contact* #12, *Captain Aero* #26, and *Captain Flight* #11 are a "bridge" of sorts between these two styles. It is for this "transitional" reason that I refer to them as "Cole's sci/fi trio" and believe they should be recognized for their historical importance.

Cole's sci/fi trio came out within the span of one year and, quite oddly, from three different companies. *Contact* #12 hit the newsstands with a date of May 1946. The company responsible was Aviation Press. *Captain Aero* #26 followed shortly thereafter in August under the Holyoke label. Finally, six months later in February/March 1947 *Captain Flight* landed from Four Star Publications. Technically, Aviation Press Publications was part of the Holyoke family, which in turn was from the Continental Magazines Company. Cole was editor and art director of Continental after coming aboard in 1942. In the years 1945-1948 Cole set out doing contract work for other companies, one of which was Four Star (*Captain Flight* #11).

Even though the hierarchy of publishers may seem a bit

confusing at first glance, L.B. Cole was completely responsible for the three books. Despite the different publishers, Cole was always in the driver's seat as to how his comics were packaged for different publishers.

Contact #12 arrived on the newsstands with a cover date of May, 1946. The cover has a solid black background with a busy assortment of lasers, vapor trails, and planets in the sky. A large red ship in the foreground is descending upon a sortie of smaller, blue ships, which seem to be attacking the helpless city below. Cole's heavy use of diagonal lines gives the cover a very dynamic sensation of movement. His use of basic colors and simplistic detail against the black background makes the cover stand out, as if leaping off of the newsstand into the hands of a reader chanting, "Buy me! Buy me!" The simplicity of this cover is representative of Cole's earlier work on *Suspense* and *Catman*. But, there is an added feeling of movement and power that would not fully appear on Cole's covers until later.



Captain Aero #26 was originally featured in color in CBM #22 (March 1995, page 37)

Captain Aero #26, which appeared three months later, sports a very similar cover. Yet, a closer look reveals much greater detail and a solid blue background. Cole's evolution into his eventually busy sci/fi covers becomes evident on this cover. The somewhat simplistic, almost abstract effect apparent on the *Contact* #12 cover has given way to a more realistic, detailed look on the *Captain Aero* #26 cover. Two planets, before just circles of solid color, have now been detailed–one into the likeness of Earth. Space ships, showing more elaboration in design, are landing on the moon. The moon itself shows great detail with an assortment of craters and mountains. A new element has been added–living creatures. Cole's use of basic colors against a solid blue background and diagonal lines of vapor trails resembles that of *Contact* #12. But his greater attention to detail places *Captain Aero* #26 a step closer towards Cole's ultimately "busy" covers on *Blue Bolt*.

Captain Flight #11, which arrived six months later in 1947, completes the transition of Cole's "sci/fi trio". Here, Cole has reverted back to a solid black background and has added even more detail to his drawings. The number of people on the cover has increased, and the number of spaceships has decreased to only one. Yet, this one ship serves as the focal point of the cover, with its vapor trail curving up and across the top. The planets in the background are more minute and unnoticeable. The greatest attention is given to the foreground, which exhibits dream-like foliage–somewhat of a "space forest". Aliens are concealed among this foliage, ready to ambush the unsuspecting astronauts. This cover depicts a surreal, almost psychedelic feel–a feel L.B. Cole is famous for on his 1950's comic book covers.

Ironically, Cole's sci/fi trio signaled the end of the *Contact*, *Captain Aero*, and *Captain Flight* titles. But the transition was complete. Cole's style of science fiction art was now evolved into what would eventually bring into existence his famous psychedelic comic book covers, such as *Blue Bolt* and *Horrors*.

Following *Captain Flight* #11, Cole continued to do contract work for various publications until 1951, when he, and his friend Jerry Kramer, bought Curtis Publishing. They changed the name to Star, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Despite the commercial success of L.B. Cole's comics in the 1940s many of them seem to remain elusive in today's market. Much difficulty is encountered when trying to locate copies of "Cole's sci/fi trio". Of the three, *Captain Aero* #26 proves the most elusive, as shown by Ernie Gerber's inability to locate a copy to photograph for his *Photo Journal*. Copies of these three books have been known to sell for up to three times *Guide* in any grade. This is not unrealistic, seeing how Cole's sci/fi trio list for only $35-$40 each in Fine, and barely $100 in Near Mint. Collectors' hesitancy to part with these gems for such a "paltry" amount also contributes to their lack of availability.

Because of their importance in the L. B. Cole timeline, their place in comic book history (late '40s) , and their intense popularity, few copies are ever available in the marketplace. Collectors should consider copies offered for sale (in any grade) an opportunity unlikely to repeat itself. Happy hunting! ■

CONTACT #12 (MAY 1946) is the earliest-dated of the three exceptional L. B. Cole science fiction covers that appeared on the last issues of obscure aviation-oriented titles that were phasing out of the post-war marketplace. Invading ships swoop in and unleash their destructo-beams against a futuristic city as a big red rocket rushes to the defense. Cole takes this no-doubt nightmarish situation and somehow shapes it into a scene of great beauty, as the engines of death are transformed into pleasing geometric patterns... aided by a background of spherical "planetoids" populating the blackness of space.

CAPTAIN FLIGHT #11 (FEB/MAR 1947) has one of L. B. Cole's most perfectly realized science fiction covers. The softness of the plants and quiet curving grace of the spaceship's descent play in contrast with the gritty suspense of the interplanetary ambush about to take place. Not only does this cover bear the Cole trademark of strong clean composition, but the drama in the foreground is balanced by the immensity of space in the background in a way that makes a rich and subtle statement out of a typical "space-opera" scenario.

Trio! L.B. Cole's Sci-Fi

TERRORS OF THE JUNGLE #17 (May 1952) Shrunken heads, witch doctors, and a bikini-clad blonde in bondage adorn the L. B. Cole cover on the first issue of this title.

BLUE BOLT #108 (APR 1951) Cole was one of the owners of Star Publications, which began by purchasing the characters and inventory of Novelty Press– hence the reprints of early-1940s strips from *Target Comics*. This issue has a spectacular sci-fi cover – a glorious jumble of rockets, planets, and spacemen.

© RURAL HOME

L. B. COLE'S COVERS TO MASK #1 AND #2 (the whole run of this 1945 title from Rural Home Publications) feature his art at its most decorative, with colors and patterns of the images (especially on the #1) carrying more weight than the meaning (although there is still a lot of that). The cover on #2 offers a wonderful gallery of faces, all suffering from the effects of "deals with the devil".

© RURAL HOME

© L. B. COLE ESTATE

"HEAVEN" AND "HELL"
Many L. B. Cole collectors consider these two original paintings by the artist to be among his best modern work. "Hell" is a collage of the most memorable Cole-created images from the 1940s. Its companion painting, "Heaven", has never been seen by the general public until now.

COURTESY THE JOHN SNYDER COLLECTION

© STAR PUBLICATIONS

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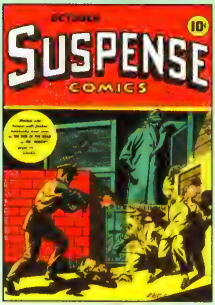
THE COVER TO WEIRD JUNGLE TALES #202, with its superb art, is an example of the titles whose covers went to press... but whose contents were never printed or distributed!

STARTLING TERROR TALES #5 (Sep 1953) This flame-shrouded green demon must have stood out even on the crowded newsstands of 1953. It's another exceptional design from L. B. Cole.

THIS IS THE ENTIRE TWELVE ISSUE RUN of *Suspense Comics* that have "overnight" gone from inexpensive esoteric to big-ticket, highly sought after items. Much of the demand is due to the high impact cover art. Indeed, interest in these books has been building ever since Ernie Gerber used the cover of *Suspense* #3 as the frontpiece for his *Photo Journal* (Vol. 1). In fact, *Suspense* #3 is now considered the "holy grail" of Schomburg covers, is one of the scarcest issues



in the run, and one of the most difficult of all Golden Age comics to obtain. In addition to the Schomburg masterpiece that has made *Suspense* #3 so famous, other cover highlights include Charles Quinlan's solidly rendered "devil idol bondage" cover on #1 and Nina Albright's spooky chase scene on #2. Of the other nine issues, which all feature L. B. Cole art, #8's "spider cover and #11's "devil" cover lead the pack.

© ET-ES-GO/CONTINENTAL L B. COLE COURTESY THE BARNHART COLLECTION

THE FLY

ARCHIE'S FLY debuted under the guidance of Simon and Kirby, who provided the excellent covers to #1 and #2. Issue #2's white cover makes it exceptionally collectible. Fly Girl, who first appeared in #13, shares a test tube with her partner on the cover of #17.

ADVENTURES OF
THE
FLY
I THE FLY DO SOLEMNLY SWEAR THAT NOTHING SHALL KEEP ME FROM FULFILLING MY SACRED VOW TO ERASE CRIME FROM THE FACE OF THE EARTH!

FLY GIRL DAZZLED the French by flying into Paris "topless", or so it appeared in this mis-colored panel from issue #20. No wonder she received such an enthusiastic reception.

THE FLY ©RADIO COMICS INC. (ARCHIE) COURTESY THE STEPHEN GENTNER COLLECTION

LATER, THAT DAY, IN PARIS...
WHAT A RECEPTION I'M GETTING! BUT THIS IS A TOUGH CONTEST--THE FINALISTS ARE ALL SO BEAUTIFUL! HOW CAN I CHOOSE ONE?

MIRACLE COMICS #1 (Feb 1940, lower right) Hillman's first comic book cover shows the Master of Space about to punch a thug in the face. Despite a certain "hero of tomorrow versus villain of yesterday" look. **#2** (Mar 1940, right) Sky Wizard's "Q-beam" flashes out to paralyze a semi-human assailant. This simple cover is nicely staged, with the hero's shadow adding a third layer to the image. **#3** (Apr 1940, left) S. W. may be seen as raising his fist in rage against the fate that befell most second-string heroes- a short life span. **#4** (Mar 1941, lower left) There's plenty of action and color on this cover for *Miracle*'s final issue. It was the failure of the Characters to rise above the crowd of contenders that doomed the title.

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ALL MIRACLE COVERS © HILLMAN

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25vg Vs Hulk . . 65.00
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1mn- 2mn Ditko . . 45.00
Konga's Revenge 30fn Ditko 15.00
LAWBREAKERS ALWAYS LOSE 1948
1vg 50.00
MAGNUS, ROBOT FIGHTER
1fn- 80.00
2mn- 85.00
MARVEL TEAM-UP
1-150 avg vf/nm (1vf+) Guide 750+ 350.00
MAR. TWO IN ONE
1-100, annu 1-7, avg vf/nm (1-10mn) . 125.00
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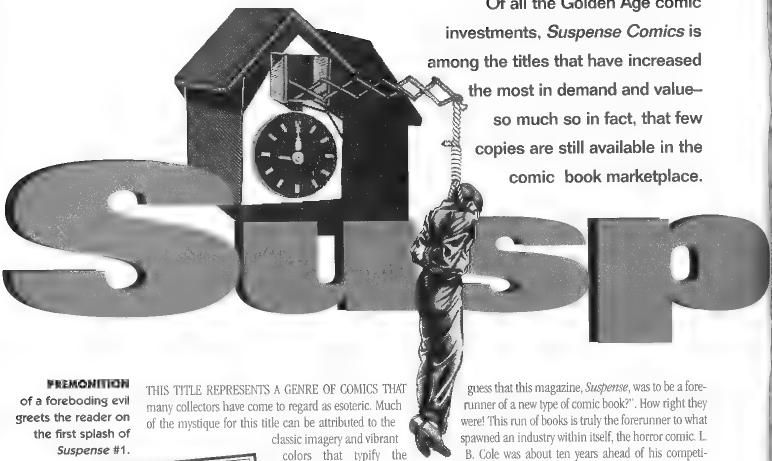


Of all the Golden Age comic investments, *Suspense Comics* is among the titles that have increased the most in demand and value– so much so in fact, that few copies are still available in the comic book marketplace.

PREMONITION of a foreboding evil greets the reader on the first splash of *Suspense* #1.

THIS TITLE REPRESENTS A GENRE OF COMICS THAT many collectors have come to regard as esoteric. Much of the mystique for this title can be attributed to the classic imagery and vibrant colors that typify the majority of the covers… including what many consider to be Alex Schomburg's best work AND the "Holy Grail" of Schomburg covers, *Suspense Comics* #3. But inside those classic covers lies relatively unexplored territory. Waiting to be discovered are tales of mystery, pathos, drama, adventure, and intrigue… played out by a cast of fascinating pulp characters. *Suspense Comics* is an important benchmark in the evolution of the Golden Age of storytelling as well. The publisher, Et-Es-Go Magazines, knew that they were onto something special, the last panel in the story "The Case of The Black Angora" from issue #1 proclaims the following: "And would you guess that this magazine, *Suspense*, was to be a forerunner of a new type of comic book?". How right they were! This run of books is truly the forerunner to what spawned an industry within itself, the horror comic. L. B. Cole was about ten years ahead of his competition… and an entire industry that was not quite ready for the horror comic.

Et-Es-Go Magazines, owned by publisher Frank Temerson, was a young upstart company struggling against the likes of *Detective Comics* and Fawcett. Et-Es-Go magazines was named for Temerson's three sisters Etta, Esther, and Goldie. Leonard (L. B.) Cole was the art director at Consolidated Lithographing when he was approached by Temerson. Consolidated did most of the liquor labels and cigar bands in the country at that time. Et-Es-Go was in dire need of a new editor and art director (not to mention a new name) to help boost interest in some of their ailing titles such as *Catman* and *Captain Aero*.

When Cole arrived at Et-Es-Go in 1942 he also began forming a new and creative approach for its publications. *Suspense Comics*, and its companion title *Terrific Comics*, were both the products of this newly focused creative effort. The *Suspense Comics* title came from a very successful radio program by the same name which was sponsored by several wine companies. Et-Es-Go started out with print runs of approximately 175,000 per issue, with a production cost was $17.50 per thousand. That included engraving, printing, and binding.

Much of the illustration for the interiors was done by freelance artists. Et-Es-Go advertised in the New York Times and

etse

comics

by Phil Barnhart

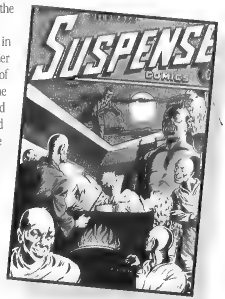
word of mouth did the rest. They culled from this pool and were able to attract some of the best talent in the industry because they paid for the work up front. In those days a page was $16 and later went up to $25. Et-Es-Go/Continental became so adept at producing the entire package that they began production for a number of other publishers such as Narrative (*Power Comics*), Rural Home (*Mask Comics*), and Aviation Press (*Contact Comics*). That familiar PDC you see on the front cover of each issue is an abbreviation for the "Publishers Distribution Company."

It begins in December, 1943

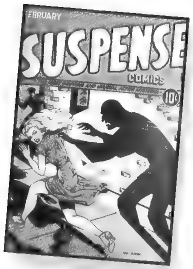
This first issue gave readers a good indication that this was not just another super hero title. The Charles Quinlan cover depicts a demonic worship or ritual sacrifice to a pagan god. From the plethora of books on the news stand this one beckoned to be picked up. To the innocent young reader, it held promise of containing tales of horrific evil doings, dark and lurid deeds performed by demons, and it was Jammed with "Thrills and Chills." All of this and more could be yours, and it was only a dime! *Suspense Comics* #1 introduced the first of several characters that Et-Es-Go marketed as regular features... hoping to develop a loyal following for them and thereby a consistent readership. The first of these was a character called The Grey Mask! The Grey Mask was actually a disguise for Dr. Malcom Muir (physician, scientist, explorer). The Grey Mask was assisted by his attendant and companion The Dove, a black peg-legged man.

This introductory story, "Premonition", plots The Grey Mask against a group of thugs smuggling black market beef through a respectable Chinese restaurant owned by a friendly old woman affectionately called Mama Chu. Mama Chu sends a message of help to a young girl patron through mental telepathy; a skill she learned during her childhood in Tibet. The young girl relays this message (which she has interpreted as a premonition) to The Grey Mask. The Grey Mask and Dove investigate and ultimately foil the entire scheme for the black marketers.

PAGAN GODS and demonic worship was just a hint of things to come (*Suspense Comics* #1).



The second regular feature in issue #1 introduced a character called The Tracker in "Bone of Contention" by John Giunta. The Tracker is Martin Corliss, a retired big game hunter that has turned his secrets of tracking jungle beasts into a method for tracking down criminals (a la DC's Manhunter). The Tracker apparently did not enjoy the same popularity as The Grey Mask since we only saw him one more time before he faded away into obscurity. Other stories in this issue dealt with voodooism, a trick knife with Nazi spies, high seas piracy, and mysterious deaths where all the victims simply had three parallel scratches to the back of a hand. This first issue lived up to its claim, it was truly Jammed with Thrills and Chills.



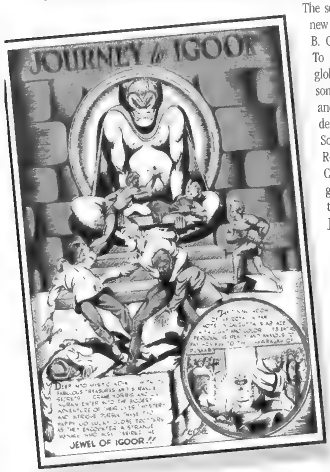
AN EVIL SHADOW threatens a fleeing damsel on *Suspense* #2, Nina Albright's only cover,

MYSTERY & ADVENTURE await those who desire the legendary Jewel of Igoor in *Suspense* #2.

It was about this time that Charles Quinlan left Et-Es-Go Magazines. He had been one of the most regular illustrators on all of the titles published by Frank Temerson. With the start up of two new titles and the departure of one of their most prolific illustrators, Et-Es-Go was left in somewhat of a bind. These circumstances helped shape the events that led to the cover credits for the next two issues of *Suspense Comics*. Eventually, these events also precipitated the changing of the name from Et-Es-Go to Continental Magazines.

Suspense Comics #2

This cover, (dated February 1944) is by artist Nina Albright and shows a young blond woman fleeing from the a menacing figure casting only its shadow at her heels... hopefully the policeman rounding the corner will arrive in the nick of time to save her from this villain. In those days, female illustrators were a rarity and Nina Albright was one of the best. She was often described as a gentle, very nice person... who loved cats. She was blond, wore glasses, and lived on the east end of New York. During her illustrating career she did a number of stories for Et-Es-Go Magazines in *Suspense*, *Terrific*, and *Catman Comics*.



The second issue introduced a new pair of characters in an L. B. Cole story titled "Journey To Igoor". They were the globe trotting and adventuresome team of Crane Norris and Jill Ingram, corresponderts for The Geological Society. The setting was The Royal Indian Hotel in Calcutta where all had gathered to pay homage to the Maharajah of Punaab. Jill and Crane were on a quest for the Jewel of Igor. It seems they were in possession of a map originally discovered by a Burmese expedition some 15 years earlier... a map that pinpoints the location of the long lost emerald in the Ankhaass Province. The Maharajah offers to escort Jill and Crane to the Temple of Igoor, but double crosses them along the way so he can possess the emerald for himself. Jill and Crane catch up to him just as he is removing the emerald from the Idol.

A struggle ensues and Jill and Crane end up with the emerald. Turns out the real Prince was killed four years ago in Scotland... and this phony Maharajah assumed his identity to find to obtain the Jewel of Igoor. The phony Maharajah had been followed by two inspectors from Scotland Yard that had been posing as his servants all this time... until he made his move for the jewel. Jill and Crane returned to the United States where the jewel was placed on exhibit in a museum; meanwhile, they waited for their next assignment from The Geological Society. They waited a long time because they never appeared in *Suspense Comics* again.

Death In The 4th Dimension

The second issue also features the debut of a new character called The Mask (not to be confused with The Grey Mask) in "Death In The Fourth Dimension". The Mask was really Steve Sampson, boy inventor. He was the foster son of Professor Eben Caleph, the worlds' authority on mathematical science. The Mask watches out for the good Professor and saves him from those who would try to exploit the remarkable genius of this aging man. One of the professor's previous students (Valco) solicits the Professor's help with his invention, The Fourth Dimension Television Receiver. With the help of the Professor, Valco is able to clearly see events of the past which were just scrambled images before. He intends to record them on movie film and blackmail prominent figures for their past indiscretions. The Professor maintains that this invention should only be used for the good of science and with The Mask's help Valco's scheme is ruined. While The Mask destroys the incriminating movie film, Valco slinks off into the night never to be seen again. This was apparently The Mask's only foe, thus we never see him again either.

The Holy Grail Of Schomburg Covers

Suspense Comics #3 (April 1944) for many collectors this cover represents Schomburg's best work of the Golden Age. The setting is a hot tropical night bathed by the eerie illumination of a full yellow moon. The air is heavy and still. Our victim, a seemingly innocent scantily clad female has been bound to the stake before her executioner. He represents all that is evil and foul; the Nazi swastika, the hooded prejudice of the Grand Dragon, the demonic sacrifice of a satanic cult. He is the devil incarnate! Basked by the fiery flames of this would be hell, the executioner and his condemned face one another in these final moments. The others look on in anticipation as the flames glint from the blade of his sword before it falls. A few bats silently flap past. We can only hope that our hero's spear will find its mark in time. I wonder if the

good Doctor Frederick Wertham ever had the opportunity to view this cover?

This issue featured two of its regular characters first introduced in *Suspense* #1. The Grey Mask was back again in a story by Jack Alderman and Thor Carlyle titled "Spectre On The Ceiling". The Tracker also returned (and for the last time) in a feature by L. B. Cole and Larry Leonard titled "Diamond Master". Et-Es-Go Magazines was in the habit of using a small house ad in a portion of the last panel of many of their stories. For example; "Remember! Suspense Comics offers you the most in comic magazine enjoyment!". The same was true for the companion title Terrific Comics; however, those house ads were specific to that magazine. For example; "For the best in comic magazines read Terrific Comics".

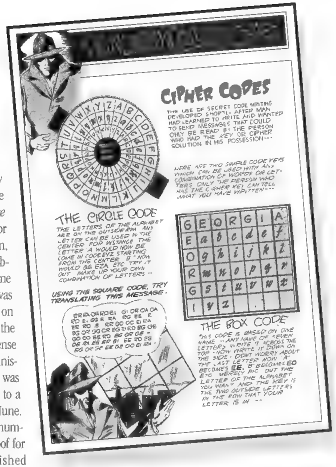
Suspense Comics #3 has three stories that all contain house ads for *Terrific Comics*, all of the other stories containing house ads in this issue are all for *Suspense Comics*. The correct editorial content of this issue was confirmed by examining and comparing multiple copies of this book. It would appear that this issue was put together largely from the material on hand. Whether it belonged in *Suspense Comics* or was slated for *Terrific Comics* it was consolidated to make up this issue. It is also interesting to note that issue #3 is conspicuously lacking a number on the front cover, this is also true of issues #4, #5 and #6. They are identified only by the month of publication.

Introducing Mr. Nobody

Suspense Comics #4 (June 1944) introduces the familiar character known as Mr. Nobody, a central element in the composition of many of L. B. Cole's covers for this title. He was often found hidden in the shadows wearing his trademark trench coat and fedora just as in this scene, we find him observing a yellow cloaked clan in the act of performing a human sacrifice. The hapless female is chained to a stone altar where she is to be slain as part of their ritual. But never fear, our hero is on his way.

This issue also marks the first of what would become some of the most classic covers ever done in the Golden Age by L. B. Cole. Some collectors are hesitant to credit Cole with the illustration for this cover. These doubts can be laid to rest as evidenced by the recent discovery of the color proof for *Suspense Comics* #4 which clearly shows L. B. Cole's signature on the lower right hand corner of the cover. This portion of the cover image was routinely cut off when the books were bound and trimmed.

The cover originally intended for *Suspense* #4 depicts a very large iron octopus wreaking havoc and destruction on a helpless city. A familiar character witnesses the scene from the shadows of the nearby buildings and narrates his observations; "A city threatened by an iron monster! Steel tentacles that would crush out the lives of humans, this was only one of the problems that the Grey Mask had to face!". This was in fact the first comic book cover that L.B. Cole ever did. It was originally intended to be used for *Suspense Comics* #1 but, for what ever reason, was never published. A short time later the artwork was slated for use on *Suspense* #4, the familiar "Suspense Comics" title reminiscent of the run was added in addition to a cover date of June. There is no issue number. The cover proof for this unpublished *Suspense Comics* cover was pictured and sold in an auction in 1983. Unfortunately it may have been the only existing copy known.

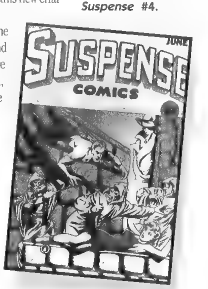


Why then did they not use this dynamic cover? As mentioned earlier, the character narrating the destruction wrought by the steel tentacled beast looks suspiciously like Mr. Nobody; however, he proclaims himself to be The Grey Mask. The Grey Mask had already appeared twice, in issues one and three. To avoid confusing readers they opted not to use this cover, but illustrate a new one adding this new character to the lineup at Et-Es-Go Magazines.

He was the ever present figure lurking in the shadows wearing his trademark trench coat and fedora, playing witness to crimes as they were committed. He conveyed a sense of surrealism, a presence without substance, flesh, or bone. He was the voice of conscience to many a criminal which ultimately led to their undoing. A character we came to know as Mr. Nobody!

In Mr. Nobody's own words, "Wherever crime takes root and starts to flourish remember this ... that even if you think that Nobody is watching you ... you're right ... For I am there-in the shadows alone!".

His name originated from a collaboration between L. B. Cole and Jack Grogan. They recognized that their new character was similar to another very popular character at



ALMOST HIDING on the last page of *Suspense* #4 is the "first appearance of Mr. Nobody.

A HOODED CULT dressed in yellow menaces their bound and helpless victim on *Suspense* #4.

A MOCKING FIDDLER serves as a reminder of how few collectors took advantage of the amazingly low prices these books once sold for.

that time, The Shadow. When Jack Grogan (writer) first saw the drawing for Mr. Nobody he asked L.B. Cole if he had anyone specific in mind? His response was no, nobody in particular. Jack Grogan immediately shouted…there's the name… Nobody…Mr. Nobody! A name that seems to have stuck and as it turns out was very befitting for this character. This issue also marks the first interior appearance of Mr. Nobody in a one page debut called "Mr. Nobody's Clue Corner". After deciphering Mr. Nobody's message, readers were given a preliminary indication that this character stood for justice, a pervasive force of right and wrong. The deciphered code reads "Crime will never pay any other dividends than disgrace and disaster!". The 1940's equivalent to our present day "Just Say No" statement.

Satan Himself!

Suspense Comics #5 (August 1944) is one of my favorite covers. It is obvious that the prone native has been slain by the man in blue for he is holding the smoking gun. The other natives seek retribution and are ready to administer their own justice, as Mr. Nobody stands quietly in the background watching (as always). The fifth issue marked the solidification of the permanent cast of feature characters and also introduced two new characters to the fold.

The first of these characters was none other than "Satan" himself, by G. H. Appel. Gangster Woody Malone is sent to Hades prematurely where he and Satan strike a deal. Since Woody has been sent to Hell six years before his due date and, cannot be sent back because it is against regulations, Woody takes Satan's place to run the joint while Satan goes on a little vacation for the next six years. Meanwhile Woody plots and schemes revenge on those who crossed him in the real world when they get to Hell. He stumbles across a quotation written on the ceiling of Beelzebub's office, "The evil sins of the soul are washed away in the river of life, but to drink these waters is to preserve the living shell from utter destruction". Snooping around Hades archives Woody finds an iron vase labeled "The River of Life". Recalling the quotation he drinks down the potion; Boom, Arummmph, Wham! Woody regains his composure and finds himself with a tail, horns, and the wisdom of the ages. He waits for Satan to return for a showdown.

At the other extreme this issue also introduces a new character of a light hearted fair. She is Sherry Flippe, the girl detective. Also appearing in this issue were the old standbys, Mr. Nobody and The Grey Mask. The indicia of this issue also reflects the position of L. B. Cole as editor and art director. The name has now been officially changed to Continental Magazines, for reasons most likely due to changes in management.

Mr. Nobody Takes Over

Suspense Comics #6 (October 1944) features one of the best covers depicting Mr. Nobody as the observer of crimes. Standing amongst the crates in a government warehouse he looks on as the crooks are cut down in a flurry of gun fire in their attempt to rob a safe. This cover also gives readers their first hint that Mr. Nobody is no mere mortal. As stated in the yellow circle, "Mortals who tamper with justice eventually must come to the end of the road ... as Mr. Nobody gazes on ... silently!".

With this issue we find Mr. Nobody beginning to dominate many of the stories. Sometimes it is only a brief appearance in the last panel with his commentary, but most issues (for the remainder of the run) contain at least one story fully narrated by Mr. Nobody. Woody Malone returns in this issue to pay a visit to the real world, get his gang together, and exterminate Grit Miller and his gang for double-crossing him. Woody returns to Satan's abode to dole out his punishment to Grit Miller and his gang only to find Satan already there. Satan had been at Grit Millers Night Club and witnessed Woody's revenge on Grit Miller and his gang. The showdown between these two fiends is at hand.

LOOKING BACK 25 YEARS

FIDDLING AROUND WITH SUSPENSE PRICES

NOTE: All Prices are for Fine (FN) condition copies, as listed in *Overstreet Annual Price Guides* #1, #10, #20, & #25.

	1970	1980	1990	1995
Suspense #1	$7	$24	$115	$430
Suspense #2	$4	$18	$70	$300
Suspense #3	$4	$14	$70	$857
Suspense #4	$4	$14	$62	$214
Suspense #5	$4	$14	$62	$214
Suspense #6	$4	$14	$62	$214
Suspense #7	$4	$14	$58	$193
Suspense #8	$4	$24	$130	$430
Suspense #9	$4	$14	$58	$193
Suspense #10	$4	$14	$58	$193
Suspense #11	$3	$14	$90	$385
Suspense #12	$3	$18	$58	$193
Total in Fine cond.	$49	$196	$893	$3,816

For 20 years, *Suspense Comics* remained an incredible bargain! It wasn't until the 1990s that the notoriety conferred by the *Gerber's Photo Journal*, combined with an new explosion in popularity for Shomburg and L.B. Cole covers, caused *Suspense Comics*' prices to significantly escalate.

The Sands of Time

The cover *Suspense Comics* #7 (December 1944) is a clever analogy to Mr. Nobody's influence over this ensemble of characters. He is the puppeteer and they are only his puppets. He is the puppeteer and they are only his puppets. He manipulates them as if they were only marionettes at the end of a string.

In an L. B. Cole story titled "The Sands of Time" Killer Wayne, a convict serving a ten year sentence escapes with his cell mate two years before he is to be set free. He is on the quest for half a million dollars in gold that he buried near the well of an oasis in the desert before the cops nabbed him. Discovered stealing a horse and provisions from a barn in the small desert town of Alvarez City, Killer Wayne and his cohort are forced to embark on their journey into the desert ill prepared for the elements

On the third day of their sojourn they fall exhausted face down in the sand while the vultures circle overhead. In a desperate starving lunge Killer Wayne grabs one of the birds and the two convicts soon find themselves rejuvenated by the meal. Finally they reach the oasis where the money is buried and Killer Wayne turns on his last companion shooting him down in cold blood.

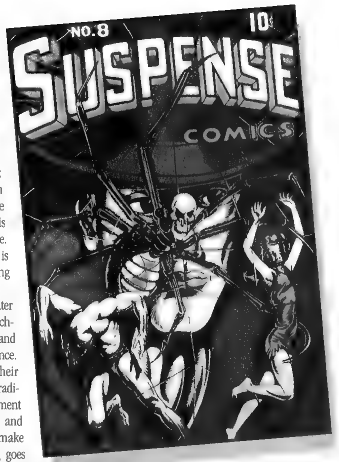
As the sand quickly drifts over his partner Killer Wayne comes to the sickening realization that eight years of drifting sand has buried his gold hundreds of feet down. Again the vultures circle patiently waiting as Killer Wayne finally succumbs to the elements while he feverishly digs for his precious gold. The buzzards finally win out in the end. Buzzards need to eat too!

Doom Of The Spider

The all-time classic cover on *Suspense Comics* #8 (February 1945) was illustrated by Cole and represents crime and evil in our society. The spider with its skull represents Death… as Mr. Nobody in the background represents the public looking on. The victims are entrapped in their own web of deception and struggle helplessly against the impending doom of the spider.

Those who have compared #8 with other *Suspense* issues might have noticed that this issue is just slightly smaller than the others in the run. It would seem that the trimmer got a little overzealous that day and trimmed more than he should have. The approximate "normal" size for a *Suspense Comic* is 7 1/4" x 10 1/4". The #8 measures in (at least all of the copies I have seen) at 7" x 9 7/8". The cover pictured with this article is actually the cover proof for that cover; therefore, it is a slightly larger and untrimmed version.

Finally, the showdown between Satan and Woody Malone, find the two of them wrestling with one another when Gangster Duke Mills keeps his date with destiny, a long awaited arrival for Satan. Duke calms things between Satan and Woody by letting them in on an infamous scheme that would be a triumph for the underworld. Meanwhile at police headquarters Tex Dungan (after an honorable discharge from the army) is promoted to detective. His first assignment is to catch the Mills gang red handed.



Days later at a water front cafe Tex approaches the Mills gang and gains their confidence. While finalizing their plans to steal some radium from a government laboratory, Satan and Woody appear to make sure the Mills gang goes through with the heist. Satan immediately recognizes Tex as a Detective, but bides his time so he can plant Tex at the crime scene so it looks like he was in on the heist. Somehow, while the others weren't looking, Tex overpowers Satan and borrows his cloak and ring. He dupes the others into believing he is Satan and lures them outside to watch the radium. Tex returns to finish his business with Woody. Tex unwittingly wears the secret weapon to Woody's destruction. When Tex strikes him with Satan's ring Woody slowly disintegrates into a quivering pile of flesh. Tex and Satan exchange words, but Satan warns that he will be back to settle the score with him one day.

SPIDERY DEATH is inevitable for these victims trapped in their own web of deception.

A CAST of symbolic Marionettes are manipulated by "puppeteer" Mr. Nobody.

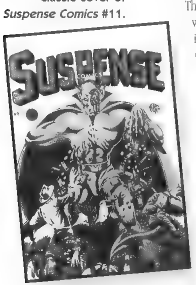
Suspense Comics #9

The cover of *Suspense Comics* #9 (August 1945) is one of the best examples of the L. B. Cole's use of what he called "the poster color cover". This cover employed the use of such vibrant colors in a spiral swirl that it is not only eye catching but nearly psychedelic. How appropriate for the central element in this cover to be an eyeball.

One of the best stories in this issue is narrated by Mr. Nobody, and is titled "Idol of Theft" by Maurice Gutwirth. It is a tale of superstition and an ancient little silver Chinese idol, The Idol of Mora, guardian of thieves. He who possessed Mora seem to have good fortune bestowed

KISS AND KILL introduced the female counterpart of Mr. Nobody in *Suspense Comics* #12.

CRIMINALS COWER before the devil because of the evil created by their own greed on the classic cover of *Suspense Comics* #11.



upon him. As was once warned long ago, when the Idol Mora was passed on to another, "Take warning, Mora can be as vengeful as he is just! Seek not to discover the secret of his power ... or evil will befall you!". Important words which should have been heeded by all those who possessed Mora. Their curiosity was eventually their undoing... it seems Mora had a secret compartment hidden in his back. When seeking the secret of the Idol they were unwittingly stabbed by a poisoned needle that killed them instantly.

Suspense #10

On the cover of the tenth issue (dated Winter 1945) Cole again employs the use of the "poster color cover" to portray Mr Nobody dangling a prized jewel just above the outstretched paws of the masses. The prized stone represents something that is unattainable to the reaching hands, yet almost close enough to touch. Mr. Nobody taunts them with the allure of a precious bauble that cannot be attained. The indicia now indicates that *Suspense Comics* is a quarterly publication.

This issue has a number of well written stories, many of which are again narrated by Mr. Nobody. One of these is a Nina Albright story titled "The Double Crossing Coffin". Yonder is the home of Burton Brunnert, 75 years old and centuries full of hatred for everybody and everything, including his family. Mrs. Groony had been his housekeeper for 20 years. The only reason she has held out as long as she has is the promise a fortune in jewels will be hers when he dies. The insufferable old man had finally lost his patience with Mrs. Groony when she burned his dinner. As a testament to his spite the old man was immediately going to write her out of his will and leave his fortune for a new library and books. He goes so far as to tell his attorney that it was Mrs. Groony's idea all along.

What Mr. Brunnert did not know was that he was followed by Mrs. Groony and she overheard everything. When he arrived home later that evening she was waiting for him in the darkness. She pushed him down the stairs, then rushed off to the movies to meet a friend. This would be her alibi. She invited her friend in for tea only to find Mr. Brunnert dead at the bottom of the stairs. She knew that they would look for the jewels so she hid them in Mr. Brunnerts clothing, a vest pocket, and left a note as if a burglar had stolen them.

Later, she visits the Mausoleum to recover her fortune and discovers that the body is not there. In a panic she phones the attorney and tells him how Mr. Brunnert hated his family and should not have been buried with them. The attorney reassures her and tells her the truth about Mr. Brunnert's last wishes, to be buried in an unmarked grave only known to the undertaker.

In a desperate effort to attain her fortune she rushes to the cemetery to dig up every grave she can. Her imagination runs wild and she believes Brunnert is mocking her with his insidious laughter. She falls to the ground in a heap outside the Brunnert Mausoleum, dead from a heart attack. Ironically the township believed that the heartache of loosing Mr. Brunnert was more than she could stand.

Suspense Comics #11

The second to the last issue (June 1946) features one of Cole's most famous renditions of the devil on this cover... this time to represent an evil that is created by greed. These would be criminals cower before the Devil as he rains down on them with a fist full of denominations. They struggle in vain to free themselves from the monetary quicksand in which they are trapped and are overwhelmed by the very thing they desire... and are slowly beaten down into submission.

A Mr. Nobody story titled "Boomerang of Horror" (by H. Larsen) plots a partner in crime against the other. Peak Dugan and Joe Moroni are splitting up the haul from their latest job. Peak doesn't like his cut of the action, but Joe is the brains in the outfit and what he says goes. Peak lures Joe to an alley where he knocks him out and then kills a police officer with his gun Peak leaves before he is discovered, but before he goes he makes it look like Joe did the shooting. The police arrive at the scene of the crime finding the unconscious Joe with the smoking gun in his hand. Joe Moroni is headed for the chair for a crime he didn't commit. Just as Joe is about to take that last walk something pains him very deeply. Meanwhile Peak is celebrating his revenge, but a nagging conscience (aided by Mr. Nobody) will not let him rest. Try as he might he cannot get away from the feeling that someone is with him. He tries to hide in the subway, but as the hours grow late, he finds himself alone again, or so he thinks. His car is boarded by a dark figure that just sits and stares back. In a desperate attempt to flee his menace, Peak gets off the train and runs into the tunnel. Mr. Nobody follows him, Peak turns to confront his fears and confesses everything to what

he thinks is the spirit of Joe Moroni. He inadvertently touches the third rail and is gone in a puff. His confession was overheard by the conductor and another passenger. The next day Joe Moroni wakes up in the hospital to learn that... his partner had framed him. Lucky thing Joe got an attack of appendicitis on his way to the hot seat.

Suspense Comics #12

The cover of this issue (September 1946) features a cuckoo clock with the "hanging effigy" of a man dangling from its extended arm. The couple in the foreground look on in shock at the tiny figure hanging from a noose. Is it just their imaginations... or a troubled conscience? Perhaps they were the perpetrators of some foul deed that led to this hanging...but only Mr. Nobody knows for sure. He quietly checks the time on his own wrist watch against that of the cuckoo clock.

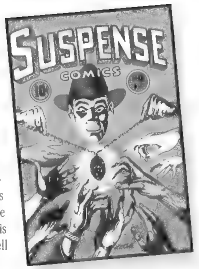
The most noteworthy story in this issue introduces a new but similar character to the lineup. She is Madam Nobody, to a woman what Mr. Nobody is to a man, her soul, her conscience. She describes herself as being very kind, even to the point of cruelty, for often it is kinder to be cruel. She is perhaps fate. She can see through subterfuge and at times can turn the tables, so that the best laid plans may go awry by the weight of their own perfection as is illustrated by a tale of deceit and irony in a story titled "Kiss and Kill".

A subject somewhat unrelated to the topic at hand, but never the less important, and somewhat unique to Et-Es-Go magazines, is the page count of some of the earlier issues. Normally comics were constructed in a manner that employed a single "flat" containing eight pages per side. Thus a single flat would contain 16 individual pages, eight pages per side. This is why most comics are either 48 or 64 pages in length, or some other multiplicity of sixteen. Et-Es-Go magazines produced a number of 56 page books. In order to accomplish such a feat, eight page signatures were cut into individual single sheets such that four individual pages could be glued into the appropriate position on a normal folio spread prior to binding. As you might expect, this would be a fairly labor intensive task which would predictably drive the printing costs up.

Naturally this practice was abandoned for what we assume would be economic considerations. Why it was ever adopted in the first place still remains a mystery. The first three issues of *Suspense Comics* and the first two issues of *Terrific Comics* (plus a few stray *Catmans'*) are all 56 page count books. The remainder of both titles are all 48 page count books.

Closing Up Shop

Shortly after the second world war was over, Continental Magazines began closing down due to a decreased volume in sales. The business was still profitable, but not as profitable as other opportunities. It was purely a case of economics. The people that worked at Continental went their separate ways. L. B. Cole went on to be the Editor and Publisher of Star Publications where he continued his career in comics. What he left behind at Et-Es-Go/Continental is truly a testament to this man's vision, artistic abilities, and story telling skills. After paging through these 12 old comics, I view this run of books as the true forerunner to the precode horror comic. I also think that it is time to give this esoteric title the well deserved credit that is long overdue.

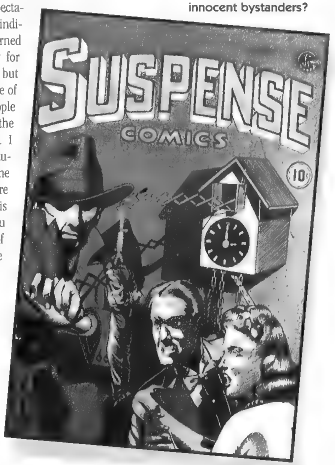


DANGLING
a precious bauble, Mr. Nobody taunts the outstretched paws with its allure.

A SWINGING FIGURE
hangs ominously before a horrified couple. Just innocent bystanders?

On a personal note

Suspense Comics have always held a particular fascination for me as a collector. This article is the culmination of many years of collecting, talking with other collectors, research, and finally an interview with the creator himself, L.B. Cole. I had my own perception of what Mr. Cole would be like with respect to his personality and demeanor. He more than lives up to my expectations. He is truly an individual that has earned my respect not only for his artistic abilities, but also because he is one of the most genuine people I have ever had the opportunity to meet. I consider myself fortunate to have had the opportunity to share some time with this great man. Thank you Mr. Cole, from all of us who appreciate your work! ■



This article was submitted to CBM by The Comic Archives. Special thanks go to Steven Breuster for his research, and a very special thanks to L.B. Cole for his invaluable help with this article.

The "Twilight" Collection

BY MARC PATTEN

Almost twenty Years ago, Chuck Rozanski made a trip to Denver, Colorado to view and eventually purchase the most significant comic book collection ever discovered, the William Church or Mile High Collection as it is commonly known today. Books from this collection have reported sales of 5 to 10 times guide, and deservedly so. They are some of the cleanest, brightest, near perfect condition copies in existence. Over the years several other significant collections have been discovered like the Allentown, "D," and Windy City collections.

In the summer of 1995 one of those rare unbelievable occurrences presented itself to Bob Gray, owner of Twilight Book and Game Emporium, Inc. in Syracuse, NY. An older gentleman in his 70's entered his establishment and proceeded to tell the same old tale of how he had purchased dozens of the great classics in comic book literature as a boy, including the first appearances of Batman, Robin, and other characters from comic lore. The twist to the story is that the gentleman insisted he still had these gems. Like most retailers might, Gray dismissed the story as folklore and the seasoned gentleman left the store.

One month later however, the man's wife telephoned Gray and repeated her husband's statement that he did indeed still have his comic books and that they wished to sell them. Gray made a reluctant trip to the couple's home and proceeded to view over 600 of some of the most beautiful and key comic book issues he had ever laid eyes on. He carefully graded the entire collection and offered to sell it for the couple in a sealed bid auction for a small commission. The Twilight Collection (as it is now known) was sold for $274,000 to the winning joint bid placed by Metropolis Collectibles and Four Color Comics, both of New York City.

"He (the original owner) was a science fiction book customer of mine who came up to me at the Make-A-Wish-Foundation comic show and told me about these old comics he had," said Gray. "He asked me if I did appraisals. When he told me what books he had, I took it as tongue and cheek. I didn't think it was anything." Gray arrived at the couple's home and proceeded to be astounded. "I started going through the boxes and saw a *Marvel Mystery* #2. 'It's too bad this isn't in better shape,' I told them. The owner commented, 'Oh I have the first one in there somewhere.'" Gray waded through the boxes of poly bagged only comics and upon finishing he said, "I don't mean to alarm you but these are worth a lot of money. I can't afford to buy them but if you're interested I could sell them for you. Book value was around $180,000. I wrote up a contract stating I would take a commission on the sale and I told him I wouldn't sell them for less than 90% of guide. I sent out about twenty packets to the more high profile dealers. I received quite a few phone calls and seven bids."

After the sale of the collection to Metropolis and Four Color, Gray brought the payment to the couple. Apparently the couple neither had a lot of money nor any kind of retirement package. "He had a big grin on his face, when I brought him the check." Gray said that the gentleman actually lost a bunch of comics through mice and water damage by keeping them in an outdoor shed. "He took better care of the Batman stuff because that's what he really liked."

The collection included many key books like a sharp copy of *Marvel Comics* #1, a beautiful run of *Detective Comics* #27-160 (including a nice #38), *Amazing Man* #5, *1939 World's Fair, Worlds Best* #1, and *Batman* #1-59. Each book from the collection came with a certificate of authenticity that gives a brief history of the collection, is signed by Gray, and features the embossed corporate seal of Twilight Books. According to the certificates, the Twilight Collection "...can be characterized by long runs of *Detective Comics, Batman, World's Finest,* most of which were high grade."

The largest dealers of golden age comics in the country entered into the sealed bid auction, but of course "there can be only one." Stephen Fishler of Metropolis Collectibles in NYC said, "This is definitely one of the most significant collections of *Batman* and *Detective Comics* ever to be found." In Fishler's opinion, the most key book of the find was "a really nice copy" of *Marvel Comics* #1. "The grade of most of the *Batmans* and *Detectives* is unbelievable," said Fishler. "To see white covers that really are white and black covers that are unchipped or faded is a rare experience."

Following the completion of the sale, Dan Greenhalgh of Showcase New England in CT, who had originally viewed the books for Metropolis and Four Color, was included in the purchase and will also be offering books from the collection.

"Just when you think that you won't see any more high grade unrestored original owner collections you get pleasantly surprised," said Robert Rogovin owner of Four Color Comics. "The books were bought off the racks. The fact that the original owner had these comics all this time and they were kept in such beautiful condition is amazing."

Marc Patten is a freelance writer in NYC who hopes to one day own a book from the sparkling Twilight Collection and bears they make nice holiday gifts.

"I wish, I wish I were THE FLY!"

The inside buzz on Archie's Silver Age hero

In June of 1959, the Fly's first appearance occurred in the *Double Life of Private Strong*. Much touted as the return of the Shield, the title died with issue #2. Undaunted, Radio Comics (Archie Comics) came forward with *Adventures of the Fly* #1 in August, 1959. This was to be Archie Comics only truly successful Silver Age super hero.

Originally, Joe Simon and Jack Kirby were going to call the Fly, "The Silver Spider"! Instead, these two giants of the industry agreed that the character should be called the "Fly" and the title was launched. With issues #1 and #2, Simon and Kirby wove a rich and bizarre origin for our hero. At Westwood Orphanage for boys, young Tommy Troy found out that Mr. Creacher, the shifty superintendent, was stealing the orphan's food money to pay off a gang of gamblers. In order to get Troy "out of the way", he hired Tommy to board with old Ben and Abigail March. Seems the March's had been suspected of being the last of a long line of witches and wizards. So disposed, Tommy was treated in extremely harsh ways while doing the chores with which the March's saddled him. Many of the pre-hero Kirby touches are evident in the pacing and layout of issues #1 and #2. (To put it into perspective, the Fantastic Four were still over two years away!)

One day, Tommy stumbled upon a secret room in the attic where old Ben practiced his "black magic". Exhausted from his chores, Tommy fell asleep and awoke to a white gleam in the darkened room! Investigating, he found it was a ring! Donning the bauble, it glowed even brighter and threw a spotlight on the wall. The spotlight became brighter and suddenly, a strange being stepped out of the light and proclaimed, "Fear not! I am Turan, emissary of the Fly people!"

Fly People

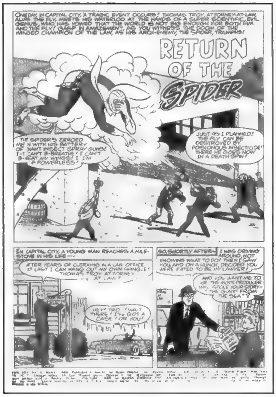
Turan disclosed that the Fly people had once ruled the Earth. They had advanced the science of magic to a point "where it was as all powerful as our atomic bombs!" Greed and the struggle for power drove them too far, and one day, their civilization was destroyed by a tremendous explosion! Some of them escaped to a parallel dimension, while the others were reduced to the insignificant life form known as the common fly.

Those left unchanged vowed war against greed and crime. "We have been waiting for one person, pure of heart, to carry on this war!," Turan sputtered. Tommy gulped, "I hope I am deserving! How do I find out?" "Rub the magic ring,"

THE WIDE ANGLE "SCREAM" was a tongue-in-cheek innovation of Simon and Kirby that attempted to give readers a "panoramic" view of the Fly's heroic efforts... the hoped for result was increased visual impact for the reader. Marcos Eyes is from issue #2.

BY STEPHEN H. GENTNER

and as Tommy utters the fateful words "I wish... I wish I were the Fly!," he was instantly transformed into the Fly! Joe Simon seemingly borrowed from Oliver Twist, (orphanage), Captain Marvel, (boy to man-hero), and tied the Silver Age Green Lantern (ultra, kindly being bestowing powers), in producing this origin.



The cover story to issue #1 pitted the Fly against, whom else?..."Spider Spry"! The early semi-satirical villains are very reminiscent of the Simon & Kirby villains produced for their "Fighting American" collaboration from 1954-55. The cover also promised to the readers a novel innovation "for the first time in comics" known as the "Wide-angle Scream"! The "scream" was the top two-thirds of the centerfold across both pages for a boffo effect!

Fly Powers

The powers Tommy Troy acquired as the Fly varied quite a bit through the run of the title. At first, his powers were the ability to walk-up walls, see from any angle, the ability to "fly", unquantified super strength, and a weapon known as the "buzz"-gun; (we'll get to the "buzz"-gun later). The Fly's winged-collar early on merely caught air currents so he could glide/fly. With these powers, Tommy Troy took on crooks like Spider Spry, Tim O'Casey's Wrecking Crew, Marco the Hypnotist, and Hans Yunkmann—Master of Junk-Ri-La! Very tongue in cheek--very bizarre, when the danger was over, all the Fly had to do was say "Tommy Troy", and he would return to his boyish normal self.

SPLASH PANEL FOR "RETURN OF THE SPIDER"
From issue #5 (March 1960). This issue is "infamous" because it is the only entry draw in a "cartoony" style.

STRIKING AND MEMORABLE
"oath" cover from *Adventures of the Fly* #3 (Nov 1959).

ALL COVERS, CHARACTERS AND ART © RADIO COMICS INC ARCHIE

The coloring schemes in these early issues were really cool! To add to the sense of movement, panic, and terror, Simon and Kirby would color panels completely orange, then contrast the characters by coloring them completely blue. Or, bright yellow panels, with a completely orange Fly in the background, and have the crook all blue in the foreground. These juxtapositions of color broke the uniformity of the storyline and emphasized key situations. It made plot elements not only jarring to the mind, but to the eye as well.

So Long S&K

After issue #4, Simon and Kirby bowed out. It appeared Simon and Kirby did issues #1 and #2, and then Simon primarily rendered #3 and #4 with some layouts by Kirby (I think). As of issue #5 (March 1960) everything changed. Nine long years had past. Gone was the Marsh couple, and Tommy Troy's neighbor and girl "acquaintance" Dolly Lake. Gone was the neat art and bizarre, satirical plots. In it's place was now an artist from the Archie bullpen trying to live up to the Simon and Kirby legacy, an impossible task! Really, the art on this one is el-stinko... but look at the act he had to follow. In contrast, the quality of the plot advanced noticeably.

In #5, Tom Troy is now an adult. The Fly has been retired and a legend for nine long years. The scared little orphan has been replaced by a self-assured attorney. One wonders how coincidental it was that a character fashioned after one of nature's most annoying creatures, the Fly, had an alter-ego as a lawyer (also one of nature's most annoying creatures). It is from this plot foundation that the balance of the run would be set upon. It's interesting that Troy would represent known criminals and get them off!

"But Troy, you know Slats Kapok has been fleecing old people for years! Why do you help him?"

"He may have done things, but this time I know he was framed. He has a right to a fair trial." Hardly a "vigilante" attitude for his day and age, wouldn't you say?

The fifth entry also ushered in new powers and a "weakness". The Fly could now drill into the ground like a "cicada", glow like a lightning-bug with "cold" brilliance to blind his foes. He could do all this, along with all his previous powers. The Fly then unveiled "his most fantastic power". The power of instinctive telepathic communication with the insect world, on the ground, flying, or in the water. Later issues all built upon these basic powers, and the realization that insecticide could hurt or kill the Fly became known. Chlordane and DDT became the Fly's Kryptonite.

Hello John Giunta

Issues #6-#10 brought onboard artist John Giunta. This represented a quantum leap forward in art, and stabilized the character's look. The powers the Fly enjoyed were further clarified. Now his strength was that of a billion ants, "the strongest creature for it's size in nature". He now also displayed "antennae keen" hearing. Issue #6 also has the

first use of his communication skills with all insects to help stop a crook. The Fly commands (a la Aquaman) scores of stinging insects to swarm a crook into submission. Now the Fly's powers were those of all insects, and he was proportionally super capable in whatever insect idiom he so chose. Marvel's "Antman" could only talk to ants and his power was limited to that. The Fly's powers were far greater and all encompassing.

The Buzz Gun

The Fly was one of the few Silver Age (only?) heroes armed with a gun. It wasn't a lead-spitter, but a contrivance known as the "buzz" gun. The thing was designed to shock into paralysis those persons or animals the Fly deemed necessary Turan's people knew how to provide goodies, not only did you get a stylish costume and powers by rubbing the magic ring, you also came heavily armed!! The intriguing thing about the Fly's use of the buzz-gun on criminals and monsters was that it generally had no effect on them!

"Great Grasshoppers! My buzz-gun has no effect on this monster!" What a surprise for us readers... especially since issue after issue depicted the buzz gun failing! It's like Rocky and Bullwinkle. "Hey Rocky - watch me pull a rabbit out of my hat... But that trick never works"! I imagine the writers put it in so that all the readers wouldn't write in asking "Why didn't the Fly use his buzz-gun on Slotho the Slug?" I was always tempted to write in and ask why does the Fly even bother carrying the damn thing? In fairness, the buzz-gun did work on lesser crooks and when all the hoo-rah was over they would subdue the perpetrators until the cops arrived. I suppose the scrapes the Fly got into wouldn't have been half so interesting if all he had to do was "scrootch" them to win the day.

Bernstein's and Rosenberger

Starting with issue #11, the definitive Fly writer and artist arrived. Robert Bernstein's stories and John Rosenberger's art finally brought the Fly to his ultimate glory! Until the end of the run with issue #30, the clean lines and wonderful proportion Rosenberger brought to the title captured all that was great about the Fly. My earliest memories of the Fly started with issue #12.

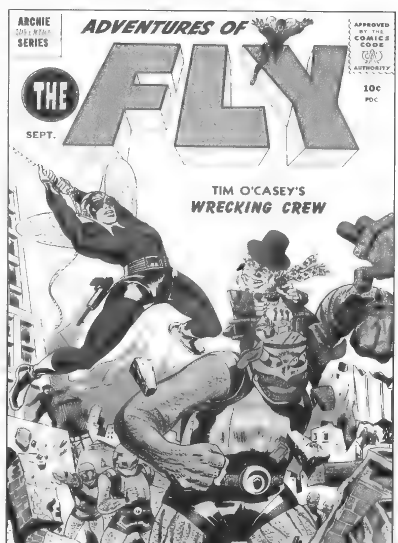
My brother Doug had a subscription to *All American Men of War* and I had one to *Adventure Comics*. While he "dug" Johnny Cloud, I vibrated to the Legion of Super Heroes. Both of us were DC guys, but we still gravitated to the Fly because the strip had such a different "feel" to it (especially when compared to white-bread, straight-up DC). There is a dentist's office feel to the Fly comics. You would expect to see some tucked between the *Highlights* magazine (where was the acorn in that picture?), and the *Picture Bible Stories*–and what was all that Bible stuff in the dentist's office about anyway? What did they know we didn't? On top of which, our dentist was Jewish!

My drugstore comic racks didn't have room to carry many comic lines in the early to mid-sixties. Dell, Gold Key, Archie, DC, and Marvel, that was it. I could get off on a Turok or Magnus, shift to Dr. Strange and Thor, groove on the Fly, and come home strong with Flash and Green Lantern. Long summer afternoons were full of my buddies and I swapping and absorbing comics, listening to the Beatles and Donovan's "Sunshine Superman"!

Enter Fly Girl

Then it happened. At Turan's behest and to help rescue the Fly, Kim Brand, sultry Hollywood actress, became Fly Girl. Victimized by a monster in issue #13. We see a teaser panel of her in a Fly Suit "coming next issue!" The Fly rescues her, and Kim has the "warms" for him big time! In issue #14, the Fly has too many predicaments from the

THE LAST SIMON & KIRBY COVER in comic book history... *Adventures of the Fly #2* (Sep 1959).



WHAT A RECEPTION I'M GETTING!
Because of a coloring error in panel 1, page 2, issue #20... Fly Girl appears "topless" as she arrives in Paris. Although coloring errors are common in comic books, they usually do not cause such "dramatic" and embarrassing results.

Metal Master. Turan appears and turns Kim on to "fly power" with another magic ring to assist the Fly. The rest was history.

Fly Girl is truly one of the most beautiful super-heroines of the Silver Age, along with Hawkgirl, Leeja Clane, and Alana. Dispelling the "blonde bimbo" stereotype, Fly Girl's resourcefulness, courage, and determination were impressive. She took to the role with both feet, amused at how her Hollywood movie parts paled when compared to the exhilaration she felt in her Fly Girl persona. Kim proved to be an excellent counterpoint to the somewhat one-dimensional personality of Tom Troy. Robert Bernstein made an excellent decision not to saddle the Fly with a "kid" side-kick. Consider that Tom Troy was a kid when he gained his Fly powers. To return to that mode would have inappropriately reprised a theme already exploited back in issue #5. And besides, what would you call a kid sidekick anyway? "Gnat Boy", "Maggot Boy"...hoo boy... "Hey kid, get away from that dumpster!"

By issue #20, the "super powers" situation had evolved still further. Fly and Fly Girl could communicate and control all insects now; and emulate their powers wholesale. Some laziness crept into their crime-fighting regimen also. The Fly's were looking for some crooks, but didn't know where to find them. Rather than hit the bricks and start patrolling, they broadcast a telepathic command for all bugs to find the criminals ("calling all bugs..." sheesh). So here you are, Ed and Sara Ant gathering food, and you have to drop everything you're doing to do the Fly's legwork for them! It's easy to see how the scope of this particular power could get a bit out of hand. In one story, they communicate (unaided) through space with alien bugs. In another, they communicate not only through space, but into the future to bugs to help thwart a time traveling miscreant.

It was this kind of variety in powers which always made the Fly's unique. Spinning a wire cocoon or marshaling a bug attack, you never knew what tack the writer would take. I had mentioned issue #20 earlier, which featured Fly Girl prominently. In the first story, she loses her Fly ring and three female criminals turn themselves into Fly Girls, too!

The second story relates how that kooky Turan said it was OK for Fly Girl to give "Fly" powers to the winner of a beauty contest in Paris. This issue contains the the only "R" rated panel I know of. Either by accident or on purpose, the artist drew Fly Girl topless as she comes in for a landing by the Eiffel Tower!

Despite the fact that part of it was missing this one time, I still rank The Fly uniforms in my top three for all Silver-age heroes. They aren't made of fabric or metal. They weren't compressed into the secret compartment of a ring or worn under street clothes. The Fly's uniforms were "magic. As their powers varied, so too did their costumes.

Sometimes the Fly would have green or yellow goggles and a green "V" on his hood. Oftentimes the "V" would be white, or just plain yellow and blend in. Fly Girl's mask started out green, went to yellow, and varied from issue to issue. One reader wrote in asking why you could see Fly Girl's eyebrows through her mask. The editor blithely replied that Kim Brand had asked Turan to allow this so she could be more expressive? That wacky, fashion coconut Turan!

In closing, I've got to say that the Fly was an integral part of my Silver Age comic life. His costume was striking, his powers were infinitely varied and unique, and the writing emulated each passing phase of the sixties (e.g. crooks, master crooks, super crooks, monsters, super monsters, etc.). The artwork from issue #11 on was masterful, delicately inked with a keen eye towards attention to detail and animal/monster/ human proportion. Tom Troy was a likable and resourceful guy. Kim Brand was a babe and a great addition to the Fly mythos. The feel of the run was different from any other title or company I collected. And what can I say... to most kids, just like dinosaurs, bugs are cool! ■

LATER THAT DAY IN PARIS
A RECEPTION I'M GETTING! BUT THIS IS A TOURIN CONTEST -- THE FINALISTS ARE ALL SO BEAUTIFUL! HOW CAN I PICK ONE?
PRESENTLY
FLY GIRL
I DON'T KNOW! THEY'RE ALL BEAUTIFUL... I HAVE TO AWARD IT TO THE ATHLETIC ONE! SHE'S THE WINNER!
SOON
A FLY GIRL
ASSISTANT
ASSISTANT
ENDOWED WITH TURAN'S MAGIC OF THE FLY PEOPLE AS A SPECIAL POWER TO MY FLY RINGS, IT CAN ALSO AFFECT INSECT KIND BY ITS NUMBER & WORK FOR GOOD OR EVIL!
MISS

The first publication from Hillman...

Miracle Comics!

The late 1930s and early 1940s were full of companies attempting to carve a niche in the fast-growing comic industry. Some titles (and publishers for that matter) vanished before readers even knew they existed. It is time to dust off the old comic box again. This time we're going to view *Miracle Comics*, published in 1940 and 1941 by Hillman Publications. *Miracle Comics* was the first foray of Hillman, (a publisher of movie magazines) into the growing comic book industry. Their other two early titles, *Victory Comics* and *Rocket Comics* didn't last beyond issue #4. In fact, only with *Air Fighters/Airboy Comics* and *Clue Comics* was Hillman able to leave any lasting mark on the Golden Age.

Miracle Comics was a typical anthology title featuring "Super-hero", jungle, crime-fighting, and comedy characters. The continuing lead feature of *Miracle Comics* was "Sky Wizard". First appearing in issue #1, dated February 1940, Sky Wizard was actually a lot of fun. His first adventure was continued over three issues (February through April 1940). His last adventure appeared in issue #4 which was not published until March 1941.

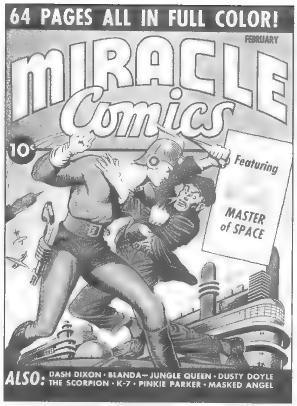
Sky Wizard (his real name was never given) is the world's greatest inventor. He builds a "stratosphere plane" and hires Capt. Dare to test fly it to China. Sky Wizard is outfitted in a red uniform with his trusty "paralyzer gun" strapped to his hip. (In fact a Sky Wizard paralyzer gun is offered free for the best five hundred letters submitted on the first issue.) He goes back to his secret lab in Texas with Dare's kids to observe the test flight on his "directional telray machine".

Unbeknownst to S.W is that Hawk Armand and Vera the Tigress and their gang have been hired by "The Unholy One" (known as "U.O." to his underlings) to steal the plans for the plane. Armand and Vera are warned, that should they fail, they will die the "death of a thousand slashes".

Upon return to the lab, Sky Wizard and the kids see Capt. Dare and the plane get captured. They decide they will set off to the rescue the following day. However, that night, while S.W. is working on his "powerstrength" formula for the rescue (to be derived from an "ant virus" to give him the proportional strength of an ant), the crooks overpower his man-servant and kidnap the kids, who the crooks will hold for ransom in exchange for the plans.

S.W. rescues them (with the use of his paralyzing gun which shoots a "Q" Beam) and returns to his lab. He then starts inflating the ground under his lab. As it turns out, the ground underneath is one huge balloon, which he is filling with helium to travel to the rescue of Capt. Dare. As he is about to leave, the crooks arrive and more than one falls to their doom as the flying sky island rises into the air. Thus ends the installment in issue #1. The action and adventure continues in a non-stop fashion as the second issue picks up the story and the "comic serial" continues.

By Jon Berk



MIRACLE COMICS #1 (Feb 1940) Hillman's first comic book cover shows the Master of Space about to punch a thug in the face. Despite a certain "hero of tomorrow versus villain of yesterday" look, it's a respectable entry.

MIRACLE COMICS #3 (Apr 1940) S.W. may be seen as raising his fist in rage against the fate that befell most second-string heroes, a short life span. This is the Master of Space's next-to-last appearance.

As the second issue opens, Hawk Armand finds a bit of "rubberium" clutched in the hand of the dead crook who had fallen from the flying island. Armand calculates the vibration frequency necessary to cause problems and transmits it to the island which results in near catastrophic stability problems until S.W. is able to turn the vibrations back against Hawk. Undaunted, Hawk and his cohorts steal a plane and head to Guatemala where S.W has been sighted.

For amusement the Dare kids are given rocket-chute flyers that allow them to soar. Unfortunately, one of the kids is attacked by a condor, who disables the flyer and causes the child to fall to the ground. There they are captured by Hawk, who has just arrived

They threaten to kill the kids, so S.W. allows Armand and his gang to land on the island. Sky Wizard and his man-servant are tied up by Hawk, who is heading with the airplane plans to the secret kingdom of the Unholy One in the Himalayas. Fortunately, S.W is able to escape from his ropes and turns the tables on his captors, locking them up. As the second issue comes to a close, all are ready for their arrival in the secret kingdom.

Issue #3 starts as Sky Wizard is looking outward from his island in Tibet. Suddenly, he is pushed off the island by a gang member, who has escaped his confinement. Both S.W. and the crook tumble off the island Fortunately, they have a parachute, but the crook knocks S.W. unconscious as they fall. S.W. would have fallen to his death, but he is caught in mid-air by a flying mountainman. The other members of the gang follow to the ground, and a fight breaks out with other mountainmen who overpower them and take him to the U.O The flying mountainmen are lackeys of The Unholy One Refusing to give the U.O. the plans to his invention, S.W. is sent to the chamber of tortures, where, after resisting the flame torture, he gives up. However, his capitulation is only a ruse to escape, and he does, and runs into Capt. Dare.

Attempting escape, they are both captured again. So too is his man-servant who brings some ant virus so that S.W. may revitalize himself. Condemned to the chamber of a thousand slashes, the power formula kicks in and he destroys the device and the lair of the U.O. The Sky Wizard commands the U.O to have his mountainmen take them back to his flying island. Once there, U.O. tries to stab S.W. in the back but falls to his doom instead. Enraged by the death of their leader, the flying mountainmen commence an all-out attack, but are driven off by balloons filled with triple nitro. Thus ends the first adventure. Whew!

The Full Page Treatment

This adventure must have really exhausted the Sky Wizard because he did not return for his next (and final) adventure until March 1941 (Worthy of some mention is that the third issue contains a full-page panel- an expansive layout touch which had started to creep into some comic titles, including "Slam Bradley" in the February 1938 *Detective Comics*, Nat Jones" in the March 1940 *Science Comics*, and "The Cyclone", in the June 1940 *Whirlwind Comics*. The final story has the Sky Wizard fight giant flying robots who commit robberies. It is very reminiscent of the Superman cartoon, "Mechanical Monsters", produced by the Fleisher studios (also in 1941).

The other recurring characters, as stated above, were the standard fare appearing in the anthology

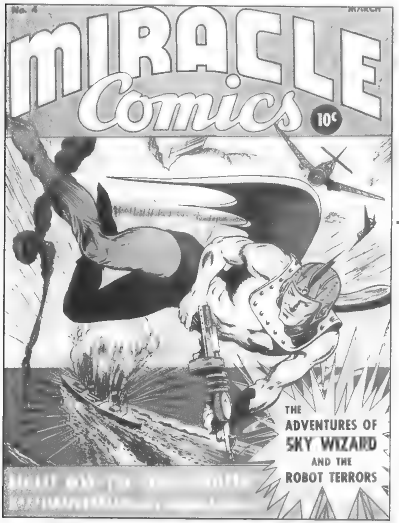
titles. There were "K-7 Secret Agent", "Dusty Doyle, the Circus Cyclone", "Pinkie Parker, the Kid Cop", and "Blanda, the Jungle Queen" representing the typical character genres. The third issue added "Bill Colt, the Ghost Rider" ("Ranger Bill Colt, whose uncanny ability for turning up when trouble brews, is known throughout the west as the Ghost Rider. His lightning draw and smashing fists spell doom to outlaws of the range...") for the mandatory western genre entry.

The crime genre is handled by the "Scorpion", who is the "terror of the underworld". He has no gimmicks or costume. In fact, he just sort of wanders about the strip as action falls into his lap. The other crime-fighter is the "Masked Angel, Nemesis of Crime". Steve Oakes' father is killed by gangsters and he becomes a one man vigilante hunted by criminals and police alike. He wears a mask, resembling "The Clock", which was being published by Quality Comics.

The final character of any "note" is "Dash Dixon". Dixon is a "superb athlete" who works for the police. He is assigned to protect Dr. Lorenz, a famous inventor who is working on the secret of perpetual life. After saving the doc's life, Dixon volunteers to have the process used on him. He is infused with "perpetual life rays", which are contained in his body by means of a special uniform. He returns to the police force as a "super man"

MIRACLE COMICS #2 (MAR 1940) Sky Wizard's "Q-beam" flashes out to paralyze a semi-human assailant. This simple cover is nicely staged, with the hero's shadow adding a third layer to the image.

MIRACLE COMICS #4 (MAR 1941) There's plenty of action and color on this cover for Miracle's final issue. It was the failure of the characters to rise above the crowd of contenders that doomed the title.



Although not usually in the fan press limelight, *Miracle Comics* is another example of the many titles which attempted to find a formula... and to make a mark (and a buck) in the increasingly lucrative comic book industry of the '40s. It's rarity, often humorous contents, and splashy covers make it worth a second look... especially by collectors searching for early oddball Golden Age titles. ■

Jon Berk is an attorney from Hartford, Connecticut and has been collecting comic books for over twenty years. His nationally renowned collection includes complete Silver Age Marvel runs, extensive Silver Age DC material, and one of the most complete pre-hero Golden Age collections in existence. This portion of his collection contains rare Golden Age comics from a broad cross-section of publishers, with emphasis on pre-hero DC, Timely, Centaur, Quality, Fox, and a large variety of Golden Age first issues.

JERRY SIEGEL'S

By the beginning of 1966, after a second period writing Superman, and helping to usher in the Silver Age of Comics, Jerry Siegel's continuing differences with DC Comics meant that he was once more separated from the character he had created with Joe Shuster, nearly thirty years before.

"The Spider was a brilliant criminal mastermind who desired to become the uncrowned king of crime. His amazing equipment enabled him to spin a kind of web."

A lesser man might have given up at this point and left the industry altogether, but Siegel was always a fighter. Over the next few years he attempted to revive Harvey's moribund superhero line under the Mighty Comics imprint, as well as writing other titles like the Owl and Tiger Girl for Gold Key. Unfortunately, none of these proved to be very popular, and it is generally considered that Siegel's work during this period is best forgotten. There was however one last character with whom he was to achieve a certain measure of success. This was the Spider and, surprisingly, he appeared in a British comic.

SINISTER CRIMINAL GENIUS

The Spider was a sinister criminal genius based in the U.S. whose adventures had been running in *Lion*, (a weekly comic similar to the early 2000 AD), since June, 1965. Drawn throughout by Reg Bunn - an artist with a talent for the grotesque - he wore a striking black and silver uniform equipped with gas and web guns, as well as a bulky backpack, that enabled him to fly short distances. Curiously, his features were almost identical to those of Marvel's Sub-Mariner.

The series had been created by Ted Cowan - a veteran writer who had worked for Lion since its very first issue in 1952. Initially, the Spider was a pure villain in the manner of Fu-Manchu, while the ostensible heroes of the strip were two detectives called Gilmore and Trask. The first story, telling of his attempts to assemble an "army of crime", ended after eleven weeks with his apparent destruction, but like all good villains he refused to stay dead.

"The Return of the Spider" followed immediately after, pitting the indomitable mastermind against a rival crimi-

From the fertile mind of Jerry Siegel, co-creator of Superman,

THE SPIDER

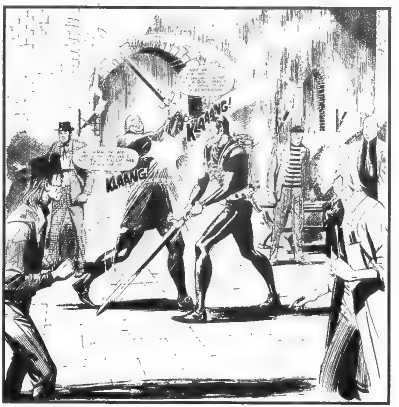
By Phil Rushton

nal called the Mirror Man. In the course of his battle with this master of illusion - which he naturally won - the Spider found himself inadvertently working on the same side as the police, even to the extent of saving the lives of Gilmore and Trask. Already he was beginning to seem less of a menace and more of an outlaw in the Robin Hood mold

ENTER JERRY SIEGEL

It was at this point that Siegel entered the picture. Somehow he had come across copies of *Lion* in New York and he wrote to the publishers saying that he was far more qualified to write about a 'superman' set in America than any British writer. Much to the chagrin of Ted Cowan, the editor agreed and Siegel duly took over the scripting reins with the third Spider serial which began in the issue dated January 8th, 1966. By an amazing coincidence, this was only four days before the American debut of the Batman TV series - an event that was to have important consequences for comics on both sides of the Atlantic

"The Spider vs Dr. Mysterioso" was billed as a clash of



The Spider and the Exterminator... two allies meet in a friendly duel.

comes The Spider, a mastermind who could spin his own web.

Titans as the Spider once more came up against a deadly rival for the crown of crime. This time his opponent was a bald-headed inventor who seemed to bear a striking resemblance to the arch enemy of a certain Man of Steel. Unfortunately, Dr. Mysterioso was no Lex Luthor: after being arrested in the fourth episode, he was completely forgotten for weeks on end while the Spider played cat and mouse with the police. Eventually Mysterioso did reappear, escaping from prison with the aid of an elastic formula that enabled him to stretch like - well, like the best pal of a certain Man of Steel. Consumed with hate, he immediately tried to blow up the Spider, only to be ignominiously arrested again when the formula wore off. As Mysterioso was dragged away by the police, vowing that he would one day return, Siegel brought the story to an overdue conclusion.

Although it had tended to lack any overall structure, Siegel's first attempt to write for a British audience was surprisingly successful in its portrayal of the Spider himself. As with Jack Kirby, whose characters always spoke like Darkseid, Siegel had a limited range of dialogue. But just as Kirby wrote the best Darkseid dialogue around, so Siegel was perfectly suited to the peculiar brand of over-the-top, self-obsessed megalomania that was the Spider's metier. When the Spider said "Nobody's perfect...except me!", he really meant it.

Having already expanded from two to three pages a week, the strip now went up to four pages for Siegel's second storyline which featured "The Spider vs. the Android Emperor". This introduced a much more formidable adversary: an immortal warlord who commanded an army of hideously deformed androids with whom he had destroyed the lost continent of Atlantis.

The Android Emperor was something of an enigma who deliberately implanted false memories into the minds of his creations; even when the Spider finally managed to defeat him, he was startled to discover that his foe was an android himself. Had the real Emperor been dead for thousands of years, or was he still alive somewhere, biding his time for a return engagement? The Spider did not care - he was more convinced than ever of his own invincibility.

The remaining heads of the underworld now realized that they would either have to accept the Spider as their leader, or kill him. Choosing the latter option, they employed a mysterious hooded assassin called the Exterminator to rid them of their problem once and for all.

PUBLICATION DATES FOR SPIDER EPISODES

The Spider vs. Dr. Mysterioso
(Jan 8 1966 - Mar 26 1966)
The Spider vs. the Android Emperor
(Apr 2 1966 - Jun 18 1966)
The Spider vs. the Exterinator
(Jun 25 1966 - Sep 17 1966)
The Spider vs. the Crook from Outer Space
(Sep 24 1966 - Jan 28 1967)
The Spider vs. the Crime Genie
(Feb 4 1967 - May 20 1967)
The Spider vs. Spider-Boy
(May 27 1967 - Oct 7 1967)
The Spider vs. the Sinister Seven
(Oct 14 1967 - May 11 1968)
The Spider vs. the Snake
(May 18 1968 - Sep 14 1968)
The Fantastic Spider
(Sep 21 1968 - Feb 1 1969)
Gadgetman and Gimmick-Kid
(May 4 1968 - Oct 26 1968)

Cover of *Lion and Champion*, July 16th, 1966.

ALL THE RAGE

By the Summer of 1966 when "The Spider vs. the Exterminator" began, 'Batmania' had taken hold in Britain and costumed crimefighters were suddenly all the rage. British comics were desperate to get on the bandwagon and *Lion* was no exception: "First Superman, then Batman, and now - the Spider!" declared the front page of the issue dated July 16, 1966, as the strip began a run of cover appearances and grew to five interior pages.

Discovering that they were evenly matched, the Spider persuaded the Exterminator to turn against the crime lords who employed him. This 'dynamic duo' then began an all-out war against the forces of organized crime in America. During the course of this epic struggle, the Spider encountered another version of the Android Emperor who finally perished when he was trapped at the heart of an atomic explosion. Meanwhile, Dr. Mysterioso chose this point to escape from jail again with the aid of another device built in the prison workshop; unfortunately, he ran straight into the Exterminator who made short work of him by banishing the hapless inventor to a sub-atomic world. After this, the last of the gang lords soon crumbled leaving the Spider and his new ally as the undisputed kings of crime.

SIEGEL'S OUTRAGEOUS MOVE

Having achieved his goal, the Spider now dropped a bombshell by announcing that he would henceforth abandon crime altogether, simultaneously neutralizing the Exterminator by transforming him into an ineffectual old man. In one outrageous move, Siegel had turned the Spider from a vicious master criminal into a full-blown superhero.

And yet, strangely enough, it made sense. The Spider was always on the very edge of insanity; to him, morality was a matter for lesser mortals only. Thus it was without a trace of irony that he stood up and declared to an astonished world: "Like an avenging demon I shall

prey on wrongdoers, accomplishing their downfall with every flash of the remarkable brilliance with which I am abundantly gifted! I say this in all modesty." Needless to say, the Spider was to modesty what Attila the Hun was to Peace, Love and Understanding!

Once you realized that the Spider was a complete loony, his stories became increasingly entertaining. The next serial featured "The Crook from Outer Space" - an alien shape shifter who chose to commit crimes in the guise of historical felons like Jesse James. In the middle of this creature's battle with the Spider, Dr. Mysterioso made yet another triumphant reappearance, having traveled "across immeasurable mini-distances" only to depart again in the same episode. The alien himself was eventually defeated when the Spider froze him in the body of a giant snake

"The Crime Gene" who made his debut in February, 1967, was another macabre villain with fantastic powers. Released from his bottle by a chain-gang prisoner, the genie freed his rescuer in turn , then helped him to embark on a crime spree. At first this magical opponent proved to be more than a match for the Spider, who found himself transported to ancient Baghdad. Turning on his master, the Crime Genie soon began his own reign of terror which finally ceased when the Spider returned and trapped him back in the bottle that had been his prison for so many years.

As Batman fever continued into its second year, the Spider's popularity was reflected by his appearance in the digest-sized Fleetway Super Library which regularly featured 120-page adventures by various writers, including the strip's creator, Ted Cowan. Altogether, the Spider starred in thirteen issues as well as a number of Annuals and Specials, though it is unlikely that any of these were written by Siegel. One notable writer who, is known to have worked on the character, is Michael Moorcock, who had previously written several other strips for Lion.

SPIDER-BOY & THE SOCIETY OF HEROES

Back in the weekly *Lion*, Siegel tried to repeat his success with Superboy by creating a youthful derivative of the lead character. "The Spider vs Spider-Boy" introduced a brilliant youth who modeled himself on the Spider to the extent of wearing an exact duplicate of his costume. Tricked into believing that the Spider had murdered his father, Spider-Boy fought a vendetta against his one-time hero that only ended when the real murderer was unmasked. Fortunately, Spider-Boy went on to join the F.B.I. rather than become a permanent addition to the series, but the Spider was not to remain without super-powered companions for long.

Up until now, Siegel had been dividing his time between writing the Spider for Britain and a plethora of Mighty Comics heroes for America (including, coincidentally, the Fly!). Unfortunately, his American work was not proving to be a success with readers: "The Mighty Crusaders" had been discontinued in 1966 and Harvey decided to pull the plug on the whole line with the October, 1967 issue of "Mighty Comics". It may well be that Siegel subsequently incorporated some unused ideas from the Crusaders in his British work, for October '67 also saw the beginning of an adventure in which the Spider joined his own superteam: the Society of Heroes

"The Spider vs. the Sinister Seven" was pure Jerry Siegel

From *Lion* dated June 11th, 1966–this was the only time Siegel ever received a byline in the pages of *Lion*, which was once more than most writers: normally, even artists signatures were whited out.

Even the Spider attempted to capitalize on the two most famous heroes in comic book history. Siegel's relationship to Superman is obvious... but what has the character Batman to do with the famous Superman creator?

at his best and worst. One by one he introduced a succession of superheroes who each came into conflict with the Spider before offering him membership in their newly-formed group. Although reluctanct to work as part of a team, the Spider eventually agreed to join them when he learned that the Earth was about to be attacked by "the most evil arch villains of all time" - the Sinister Seven

Soon the skies over the embattled planet became filled with struggling heroes and villains as the Spider fought alongside Tigro, Snowman, Mr. Gizmo, Rock-man, Rex Robot and Captain Whiz (with his 'Marvel-lance'!) against Limbo the Unknown, the Shark, Muto, Sylvester Jenkins, Gas-Man, the Mad Meckanoid and the Living Totem. For week after week the battle continued, with the advantage constantly shifting from one side to the other Time and again individual confrontations were punctuated by flashbacks to macabre origin stories, while strangely apocalyptic events began to be shown all over the universe - including a weird living world called Planet-Head... who was introduced and destroyed in the same panel!

At last, this enormous fight scene began to reach a conclusion as, one after another, the combatants fell. Even the cowardly Captain Whiz was finally redeemed when he charged to his doom against Muto–the terrible living sword. At the end of the final episode only the Spider was left, sadly gazing at a monument to his gallant comrades who had given their own lives to save the world

SPIDER VS. SNAKE

In some ways, this frenetic storyline marked the high point of Siegel's association with *Lion*. While it was running he even began a second series called 'Gadgetman and Gimmick-Kid' which ran alongside the Spider for six months. Drawn by a young Vincente Alcazare who later worked for DC and Marvel, this featured two high-tech heroes who were obviously based on Batman and Robin, with their Gadgetcraft, Gadget-Cycle, etc

"The Spider vs. the Snake" which began in May, 1968, returned to a more traditional type of story with a villain who wanted to emulate the Spider's previous career as the king of crime. The Snake proved to have an even more tenuous hold on reality than the Spider and, after a failed attempt to turn the crimefighter back into an outlaw, he snapped completely. Washing his hands of humanity he tried to re-populate the world with a race of intellignet snakes, but was ultimately overcome by his own creations

This story also featured yet another return appearance by the ubiquitous Dr. Mysterioso. Growing to gargantuan proportions, he took on both the Spider and the Snake, but soon ended up dwindling back to his sub-microscopic universe, and then beyond to a "sub-sub-microscopic" one. The fact that he kept turning up over and over again leads one to suspect that Siegel had a special fondness for this Lex Luthor look-a-like; perhaps he reminded him of happier days.

THE LAST WEB-MASTER

In the Fall of 1968, Jerry Siegel and his wife set out with a trailer to move from New York to Los Angeles. Although he continued to send bundles of scripts from trailer-parks along the way, the editorial team in London became concerned about their frequent inability to contact him. It was during this period that Siegel began his last and perhaps least successful Spider story.

Throughtout all of his adventures, from the very beginning, the Spider had been accompanied by two assistants an ex-safecracker called Roy Ordini and a bespectacled scientist known as 'Prof' Pelham. Yet in spite of the fact that they both saved his life on numerous occasions, the Spider insisted on treating them as untrustworthy dolts, while expecting nothing less than total adulation in return. Finally, the worms turned when their overbearing leader accidentally increased Ordini's intellect to genius level. The ensuing storyline told of the struggle between the Web-master and his renegade henchmen, until it was revealed that they were only pretending to be enemies in order to capture some criminals.

As he was writing this story, Siegel's relationship with *Lion* began to go badly wrong. The Gadgetman strip was discontinued at the end of October, while the Spider was cut back to just three pages a week. Things ultimately came to a head when editorial frustrations about the irregularity of his scripts led to the decision to replace him. Ken Mennell, who had already written Spider stories for the Super Library, took over with the issue dated February 8th, 1969, but it was already too late for the Webbed Wonder: three months later, in the face of budget cuts forced by declining sales, the strip was canceled.

Altogether, Siegel's work on the Spider stretched to over 500 pages on which he was teamed with a first-rate artist in Reg Bunn (unlike much of his American output at this time). For one last Indian Summer, his career had been temporarily rekindled in a foreign country by the reflected glow of Batmania; but now the party was over. In the early 70's, with a cold wind blowing through the comics industry everywhere, he said farewell to the medium that he had done so much to create.

Jerry Siegel will always be known first and foremost as the originator of Superman, but to some of us he will also be fondly remembered as the writer of that "greatest of all heroes" - the fabulous Spider. ■

For those wanting to know more about the 22 year history of Lion, *the author highly recommends The Complete* Lion *Index by Steve Holland. It's available from A & B Whitworth, 17 Hill Street, Colne, Lancashire, BB8 0DH, England.*

Consecutive pages from May 4th, 1968– the penultimate episode of "The Spider vs. the Sinister Seven", featuring the end of the Society of Heroes.

Quiet But Strong

Perhaps this is just the quiet before the storm, or perhaps this market serenity is just the return to the pre '95 Gold Rush status. I really wouldn't know or recognize it, it has been so long. Though it is true that Nick Kronfeld, World's Finest, and the Twilight Collection with the East Coast triumvirate of Metropolis, Four Color, and Showcase New England are all keeping busy with sales, the feedback that I have been getting is that dealers and collectors have noticed a slight down turn in the market. This is not to be mistaken for a lack of interest or a "soft" market. Quite the contrary. Many collectors are just as anxious to purchase quality material as ever, it is just that there seems to be a lack of quantity for purchase.

Many sellers are telling me that they are waiting for the new Overstreet Update so that they can then make their price adjustments. In this lull, sellers are taking the opportunity to put some of their lower grade material and slower selling items on the market. To the surprise of many, they are selling these books to readers. This resurgence, (and cornerstone of our hobby) of the reader is bringing much attention to the previously under-read and collected books of the post-WW II and 50s era. Thus proving once again, that when books are priced at the correct market threshold, true collectors and readers do respond. These readers are the ones that are furthering the hobby by documenting previously undocumented Matt Baker artwork, key appearances, story line changes, etc...

Golden Age:

Things are starting to make more sense to collectors, but for awhile back there being a collector was a tough position to be in when you do not plan on selling a book a week or two after purchasing it. Not that I believe that Golden Age books are overvalued, quite the contrary. Most Golden Age still has a long way to go. Collectors just realized that it was difficult to pay multiples of Guide for low grade issues and pay close to $1,000 for 56 pages of Timely or DC "Kleenex".

Schomburg airbrush covers still lead the way, as does many of the Standard/Nedor titles. Non-key DC issues are being sought out in high grade, but just take a look at these prices realized in September. The market seems to be quiet but strong.

Golden Age Sales Reports: All Select #4 FN+ $620; Seven Seas #3 VF- $485; Human Torch #15 VG/FN $500; Sub-Mariner #7 GD $295; Adventure #93 VF+ $975, More Fun #71 FN/VF $3900; Blonde (Feature Books) #34 VF/NM $900; Joe Palooka #2 VF+ $175; Green Lama #1 FN $1,100; Shadow Comics #1 VG/FN $2,495; Captain Marvel Adventures #5 VF- $650, Detective #31 FR $700, #38 VG++ $6,700; Black Terror #24 VF- $280, Archie Comics #3 NM- $255, All American #19 FN+ $13,500; Blue Beetle #200 VG+ $100

1946-52 Comics:

The re-evolution of the reader is nowhere as prevalent as in the post WW II era. Grade does not seem to deter the reader as long as it is priced fairly. The result is a growing awareness of the content of these books. Content that had previously gone completely undiscovered by a huge segment of the collecting market. And when readers find a particular title that they enjoy, they begin collecting the title. Kind of sounds like the foundation of our hobby, huh? Also, one can find infinitely more examples for multiples of Guide in this genre. To pay multiples of Guide for a book that guides for $28 in NM is really not that far fetched or painful, and is happening with greater frequency. The odds are very good that this period holds some of the most interesting and previous unreported information in the entire hobby.

Captain Marvel Adventures #138 NM $200; Captain Marvel Jr. #115 FN+ $70, Family Funnies 1950 #1 NM $150; Hector Comics #1 VF+ $35; Headline Comics #1 FN $45; My Love Affair #1 VF+ $140, Never

continued on page 71

MARKET REPORTS

JOHN CHRUSCINSKI & BRUCE ELLSWORTH
Tropic Comics, Planation, Florida

The marketplace seems to be heading in quite a few different areas. The first area is 10¢ DC's. These (circa 1953-61) are selling almost as fast as we get them at Guide in all grades. Superman leads the pack with Batman is a close second. Mystery in Space and House of Mystery are also on everyone's want list. I have been getting in more want lists for DC war comics (especially Army at War, All American, and GI Combat). The artwork and stories never cease to amaze me.

Recent sales: Action #50 FR/GD $85; Adventure #252 FN $42, #255 VG $35, Superman #100 GD $13, other Golden Age at Guide: Bachelors Diary #1 GD $85; Green Lama #6 VG $70, Target V1 #12 GD/VG $175.

The second area is Golden Age keys (or lack thereof). Keys are selling at multiples of Guide (Duhhhh...how many times have you heard that!) but what about other non-keys. I have compiled a list of non superhero keys which sell for way over Guide.

1. Suspense #3 - extremely rare, less than 200 copies known to exist (I confirmed a price of $20,000 the other day)

2. Science #1 & #2 - Great covers less than 75 copies known to exist (Have sold in VF85 for $3,500 and $2,500.)

3. Weird Comics #1 - less than 100 known copies. Great Lou Fine bondage cover sold in VF for $4,000.

Continued

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TROPIC COMICS continued

4. Phantom Lady #17 not that rare but almost never for sale in high grade (sold VF83 for $6,000 in 1995)

5. Startling Comics #49 - same as Phantom Lady #17 (sold for $2,000 in VF/NM in Chicago 1995)

6. Mystery Men #1 - less than 100 known copies, hard to find. (sold for $10,000 in VF87.)

7 Wonder World #3 another hard to find Fox (sold for $6,000 in VF88).

8. Hit Comics #5 Classic cover less than 100 copies (sold for $4,000 in VF/NM in 1995.)

These are some outrageous prices for non-keys but covers definitely sell books! The only book to actually be a key in this group is Mystery Men #1 whose character, Blue Beetle, appeared for the first time. The Flame appeared in Wonder World #3 but the character has not been revived.

The third area is 1960's Marvels & DCs. If you advertise in the trade papers you will find many ads advertising mid 60s Marvels and DCs at below Guide. Granted that most are GD to FN but even some high grade stuff and keys are included. This means most Guide prices for books in FN or lower should be adjusted to reflect this

For instance, a John Doe #1 is worth $1,000 in MT Guide and $350 in FN. I believe the book in VF or NM is worth Guide but just try and sell it in FN for $350. No takers. FN is the hardest grade to sell comics in. Even VG is hard.

The hobby is divided into two groups-high grade investment comic buyers and low grade collector/readers. Most of the collector/readers don't want FN and cannot afford it. I feel that the Price Guide needs to address this problem! Nuff said!

Recent sales: Tales of Suspense #62 NM $30, #70 VF/NM $2, #80 VF/NM $400, Tales to Astonish #69 FN $12, #78 VF/NM $20, #83 FN/VF $10, #86 VF/NM $17; X-Men #72 VF $9, #84 VF $6, #90 FN $4. . .all at 50% off of Guide!

RICHARD EVANS • BEDROCK CITY COMICS • HOUSTON, TEXAS

Things have been fairly steady for the last few months. Any new material we receive which is either unique, attractive or affordable has immediate interest.

GOLDEN AGE - We have noticed an increased demand for lower grade mainline books such as Superman. Batman, All-Star etc. Timely continues to sell though, but not at multiples of Guide for lower grades. We have sold more Fiction House, Hillman (Airboy), Lev Gleason (Boy, Daredevil) and Chesler than in the past. I believe that all of this is a function of price.

Recent sales: Action #51 VG $175; Blackhawk #45 VF $85; Hit #1 GD/VG $400; Planet #24 FN/VF $320, #49 FN/VF $160, #64 FN $125; Sheena #7 VF $165; Zip #39 VG $60.

HORROR, GOOD GIRL ART, ESOTERIC 1950S COMICS - This is where all the Action is for us these days. We ran a full page ad for Atlas Horror and War books in CBM and had 85% sell through! We ran another ad that had one column of high grade and pedigree Golden Age and two columns of mid and low grade horror. We sold 75% of the horror and 0% of the Gold! I must have priced the Golden Age too high!

Silver Age - As for the Silver Age, that has been the steadiest area for us both in the store and through the mail. While pre-1960 *continued on page 73*

GREG WHITE • COMIC BOOKS & COLLECTIBLES • KISSIMMEE, FLORIDA

SILVER AGE: An active area this month! We have been fortunate to purchase three collections that include a group of high grade 1960's Charltons, a large run of early Marvels and a solid selection of late 50's-mid 60's DC's. Store sales and mail order remain sound, however convention sales this year have been flat. Hopefully, the flea market mentality that has pervaded the recent shows will dissipate soon, and older, seasoned collectors will return. Demand continues to be high for top condition. I recently offered a long standing customer a VF Fantastic Four #1 for $7,500. He spurned the book and asked us to find him a Near Mint as he is willing to pay $12,000-15,000 for a copy in that grade.

Recent sales include: Star Trek #1 VG $95; Space Adventures #33 VF $98; Daredevil #16 VF $60; Amazing Spider-Man #1 VG/FN $2,500; Avengers #4 VG $195; Fantastic Four Annual #1 GD $60; Batman #155 VF $195; Flash #123 GD $95.

GOLDEN AGE: Always an area of interest. Demand continues for many titles from this period. First issues, origin stories and first appearances top the list. Keeping a stock of such books is difficult. They simply do not pop up as often as they once did. We did pick up a few early Batman and a nice run of More Fun recently. We also were able to buy great copies of Green Lantern #2 and All Star #2.

Recent sales: Batman #4 VG $995; More Fun #13 VG $295; World's Finest #7 VG $250.

ARTWORK AND TOYS: A good deal of activity recently. We picked up a nice Carl Barks piece and a great Golden Age Green Hornet cover by Al Avison. We also saw a great deal of movement on our Disney animation artwork. Toys have been quiet. Where is that elusive collection of Aurora model kits and Captain Action dolls?

Recent sales: Mickey Mouse cel 1940's $250; Donald Duck animation drawing, 1943 $150; Gil Kane pencil drawing of Green Lantern $295.

That's all for now, have a great Thanksgiving.

DAN FOGEL • Comic Detectives
Berkeley, California

A hearty "hello again" to CBM readers far and wide, from the original Comic Detectives. Congrats to the new CBM . . anything that promotes the continued good health of this, the finest comics-related publication in da world, is tops in our book! We'll be contributing market reports, periodically, beginning with this year's San Diego Comic Con . . . but we'll limit ourselves to pre-1970 sales, as per secret Pentagon orders!

Pre-Hero/Early Hero DC - Interest in these Jurassic beauties is at an all time high, no matter how low the condition! Sales-New Adventure Comics #28 FR $100; More Fun Comics #25 GD+ $300; Adventure Comics #44 & #62 both FR (the pair) $175.

Golden/Silver Age Quality & Fawcett - Sales were the highest in years for these companies. Sales-Police Comics #12 FR (lots o'tape) $72; Captain Marvel Adventures #19 GD $50, #29 VG $75, #35 FR $20, #71 GD $12, #74 GD $15, #82 FN- $40, #121 GD- $15, #150 GD $20; Captain Marvel Storybook #2 FN+ $150; Marvel Family #61 GD $10. A pile of low-grade books went to one of our most talented and discriminating customers, CBM's own Michelle Nolan, who bought Plastic Man #57, Marvel Family #33, #46, #68 & Captain Marvel Adventures #122, for a "paltry sum"! Wotta Deal!!

Disney/ECs - As usual, lots of lookers and few buyers. Sales-Walt Disney's Christmas Parade #6 GD+ $50; Tales from the Crypt #200 & #24 GD+ (the pair)) $235; Mad #89 & #92 GD $12.

Silver Age DC - Sales were good but still not as brisk as Marvel. Batman #166 GD $10, #170 VG $16, #198 VG $16; The Brave and the Bold #59 GD $15, #62 GD+ $15, #69 GD $4; Detective Comics #320 GD+ $8; JLA #68 GD $2; Superboy #131 & #144 $3.50 each; Superman #211,223 GD+ $5 for the pair; World's Finest #151 GD $2.

Silver Age Marvel - Buy now or Hulk smash! Amazing Spider-Man #65 FN+ $30; Avengers #24 GD- $3, #33 GD $4; Captain America #103, #107, #118 FN $35 for the set, #105 VF $26 and #109 FN $300. Fantastic Four #55 FN $25, #61 FN+ $20, #100 FN+ $30; Iron Man #6 FN+ $25. Journey into Mystery #106 VG+ $20, #108 GD $10, #117 FN+ $24; Silver Surfer #11 VF+ $400, #12 $40, #14 FN+ $25, #16 FN+ $30, #17 VF+ $40, #18 VF $35; Tales of Suspense #92 FR $2.500, #93 FR $2; X-Men #32 GD $6 and #78 FN+ $10.

Aloha from the Comic Detectives!

Agàiñ #1 FN $22, Top Secrets #7 VF $138; Torchy #4 FN++ $235; Laurel and Hardy #1 VF- $295, Leading Comics #41 VF/NM $185, Our Army at War #3 FN $265; My Desire #31 FN $40; Crimes By Women #6 FN/VF $255; Crown Comics #3 NM- $120.

Silver Age:

Silver is still making a "comeback". (Did it ever really decline?) Although high grade DC copies still lead the way, collectors are realizing just what makes Silver special; it is accessible to readers, it is for the most part affordable, and can still be found. Dell movie books are beginning to heat up around the country and collectors are searching out the Mission Impossible issues in anticipation of the upcoming Tom Cruise movie.

Showcase #45 VF/NM $350, #27 VF+ $500, #20 FN $289; Green Lantern #59 FN+ $100; Tales of Suspense #39 VF+ $2700, Strange Tales #135 NM $150, X Men #51 VF/NM $50; Dark Shadows #1 VF++ $180, Mission Impossible #1 VF- $70; Amazing Spider-Man #3 VG $380, #17 VF- $420; Incredible Hulk #1 VF+ $9,450, Fantastic Four #48 MT $1150; The Fly #1 $185, Iron Man #1 MT $310; Captain America #117 NM $95; Brave and Bold #34 VF++ $1,295

Bronze Age (1970s):

Conventional wisdom for most collectors is that early '70s is an uninteresting period in which to collect. Low sales were attributed to diminishing quality, and print runs were lowered. Attrition of these books was actually much higher than is now realized, and a majority of collectors are watching this genre pass them by. Yet as the 20+ factor kicks in strong, collectors and investors are looking at this period for great reading and price escalation. I receive more response regarding the '70s books and their collectors. These collectors seem to be lacking in press coverage, accurate pricing, and a forum for discussion... but just take a look at any CBG or CBM advertisement for these '70s books, call the dealer, and you'll be amazed at the prices that are being realized.

Dark Mansion of Forbidden Love #1 VF/NM $48; Strange Sports Stories #1 NM $18; X-Men #94 VF++ $295; Amazing Spider-Man #120 VF/NM $45, #1300 VF+ $25; Forever People #1 NM- $60; Fun In #1 FN $13, Secret Origins #1 MT $20; Dead of Night #11 VF/NM $8; Manthing #1 VF/NM $30, Daredevil #81 NM $18; Sgt. Rock #300 NM $8, Ghost Manor #1 NM $35, Tower of Shadows #8 VF/NM $15, DC 100 Page Super Spectacular #14 NM $25; House of Secrets #100 MT $12; Iron Fist #1 MT $25; Invaders #1 MT $20, Journey into Mystery #1 MT $9; Rima #7 MT $18.

Overall:

Contrary to many rumors I've been hearing, when the real results are examined, the market is doing very well and seems to be healthy. Certainly some segments are doing better than others, but overall interest is very strong. From low grade pre-DC hero to mint House of Mystery Wrightson covers, collectors are looking for the out of the ordinary, the unexpected, and definitely the unusual. When collectors are no longer 99.9% unified in their quest for high grade Timely books, the market's force can seem to be diminished somewhat, but when the results are tabulated, comic book collecting is just entering a new (and even more competitive) phase. And if you don't think so, just call a dozen large dealers from around the country and request any "rare" or "high demand" material. More often than not, you'll often receive a response that is a sure indicator that material is still in great demand. That response is "That book is already sold, but I'll put you on the waiting list for the next copy I get..." ■

LAST CHANCE – TAKE THE PLUNGE!

Continued from page 10

grammar shall be employed.

13. Ron Kar is: a. A "precursor" of sorts to Manhunter from Mars. b. A "precursor" of sorts to Captain Comet c. A "precursor" of sorts to Adam Strange. d. A "precursor" of sorts to Tommy Tomorrow.

14. Scrooge McDuck's parent's names were: a. Scottie and Mable b. Angus and Matilda c. Quackly and Hilda d. Fergus and Downy.

15. "Howzabout a knuckles message, sweetie-pie?! No Charge! Just use your super-villain credit card!" is associated with what company's Silver Age characters? a. Archie b. Marvel
c. Tower d. Charlton

16. What artist did the cover of Dell's Nukla #1? a. Sal Trapani b. Rocke Mastroserio c. Paul Reinman d. Stan Kaye

17. What Dell comic first mentions the Junior Woodchucks' Guide by name? a. Uncle Scrooge #5 b. Walt Disney's Comics & Stories #125 c. Four Color #456 d. Huey, Dewey and Louie Back to School (Dell Annual #22)

18. What early critic of comic books described them as " Sex-Horror serials" and "Pulp-paper nightmares." a. Sterling North b. Child Study Association c. Dr. Fredric Wertham d. The Indianapolis Police Department

19. Marcia Reynolds leaves her secretarial job in 21st century Titan City to become a. Futura b. Mysta c. Gale Allen d. Star Pirate

20. The cover art to Classics Illustrated #124 (1955 edition) was done by: a. Lou Cameron b. Del Tobias c. Robert C. Dille d. Harry Harrison

21. Archie Comics was originally known as MLJ Magazines, which took its name from the initials of: a. The first names of the founders b. The first names of the wives of the publishers c. The street car line that ran in front of the publishers building
d. A popular singing quartet of the era.

22. American Comics Group (ACG) was partially owned by: a. Harry Donenfield b. M.C.. Gaines c Ogden Whitney d. Richard Hughes

23. Atles/Seaboard Publishing did NOT produce this comic book: a. Scorpion Woman b. Phoenix c. Ironjaw d. The Grim Ghost

24. Avon's first entry into the comic book field was the title: a. Molly O'Day b. The Sea Hound c. Eerie d. Strange Worlds

25. The longest running comic book from Better Publications was: a. Thrilling Comics
b. Thrilling Wonder Stories c. Thrilling Detective Stories d. Exciting Comics

26. Which of these characters was NOT created by Carl Barks: a. Huey, Dewey and Louie b. Gyro Gearloose c. Junior Woodchucks d. Gladstone Gander

27. The last comic book published by Centaur was: a. World Famous Heroes b. The Arrow c. Star Ranger d. Star Comics

28. The Classic Comics series changed its name to Classics Illustrated in what year? a. 1947 b. 1946 c. 1945 d. 1943

29. What was Harry Chesler's real middle name? a. A b. Alvin c. Albert d. Alan

30. Dean Denton (from Detective Picture Stories) had a previous job as: a. a radios highest paid ventriloquist b. a newspaper columnist c. a college teacher of forensic science d. a banker

31. Uncle Scrooge's uncle's names were: a. Angus and Jacob b. McTavish and McGinty c. Cornelius and Quackly d. Hannibal and Roddy

32. The first published collection of an American comic strip was entitled:
a. Yellow Kid Magazine b. Funny Folks c. Foxy Grandpa d. The Katzenjammerkids Kollection

33. Big Shot Comics (1940) DID NOT feature: a. The Dagger b. Skyman c. The Cloak d. The Face

34. Marvel's The Whizzer gained his uncanny speed by: a. An injection of mongoose blood b. Being hit by lightning in a chemical factory c. Being bathed in comet dust d. Eating a super-speed metabolism pill

35. Donald Duck's middle name is:
a. Fauntleroy b. Chauncy c. Rupert
d. Albert

36. Before joining the Foreign Legion, Duke O'Dowd's occupation was: a. Crack air pilot b. Chemist c. Daredevil race car driver d. Librarian

37. The Detective Chimp's name was a. Bobo b. Cheeta c. Kanga
d. Tobo

38. The radio voice of Superman was:
a. Bud Collyer b. Bill Cullen
c. Gary Moore d. Don Ameche

39. Spyman's real name is:
a. Johnny Chance b. Lucky Kerrigan
c. Ace Cardman d. Flint Grannito

40. Coo Coo comics featured the origin of. a. Super Mouse b. Mighty Duck c. Speedy Rabbit d. The Bird Brain

41. The Legion of Super Heroes lived in the: a. 26th Century b. 27th Century c. 28th Century d. 30th Century

42. Which Julie Schwartz invented Silver Age alter ego was named after the editor of Amazing Stories? a. Ray Palmer b. Barry Allen c. Carter Hall d. Hal Jordan

43. Gold Key's first published comic book was: a. Walt Disney's Comic's & Stories #264 b. Dr. Solar, Man of the Atom #1 c. Yogi Bear #9 d. Turok Giant Size #1

44. Who was never a member of the Mighty Crusaders? a. Pureheart The Powerful b. The Shield c. Captain Flag d. The Web

45. 1968's Brother Power The Geek was originally a: a. Mannequin b. Robot
c. Alien d. Shape-shifter

46. Private Strong's alter ego was: a. The Shield b. The Fly c. Captain Flag d. Black Hood

47. Magica de Spell first appeared in which comic book series? a. Uncle Scrooge b. Walt Disney's Comics & Stories c. Donald Duck d. Mickey Mouse

48. Who was NOT an original member of the JLA? a. Green Arrow b. Superman c. Batman d. Wonder Woman

49. T.H.U.N.D.E.R Agents included everyone listed except: a. Undersea Agent b. Noman c. Menthor d. Dynamo

PRIZES PRIZES PRIZES

50. Mr. Natural was created by: a. Robert Crumb b. Gilbert Shelton c. Skip Williamson d. Pete Poplaski

I'll bet you thought we were putting you on and never were going to announce the prizes. Hoo-Hah... fooled ya! We actually do have some pretty neat prizes for this furshingliner contest, and here they are:

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✔ A genuine official certificate, suitable for framing, that proves to everyone in your neighborhood that you were actually the first place winner (assuming you want to make this public information.

2nd and 3rd place will receive -
✔ An editors presentation bound volume of Comic Book Marketplace #22-29.
✔ A genuine official certificate, suitable for framing, that proves to everyone in your neighborhood that you were actually a winner.

RICHARD EVANS continued

comics mostly sell via mail order or to our established collectors, Silver Age has an audience anywhere, in any grade, as long as the price is right.

Recent sales: Spider-Man #1 GD/VG $1100; Showcase #13 GD/VG $350; Detective #233 GD $200; Fantastic Four #19 VF $130; Tales to Astonish #41 FN/VF $110.

The other stuff department - We purchased a batch of premium rings and decoders. Interest was very high, particularly on the superhero related items. We sold a Superman Crusader Ring VF for $300 and a Superman Jet Plane Ring VF for $250. We also sold a Captain Marvel tie-tack VF on a FN card for $175.

Also, with the release of "Crumb" we have had an incredible increase of interest in the undergrounds. Fortunately, most of these are available in reprint for those who just want a memory rush! But, first printings are drying up. I still don't understand why these books aren't listed in the Overstreet Guide while some of the goofy stuff printed today is.

— END MARKET REPORTS

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Here's What I Think!

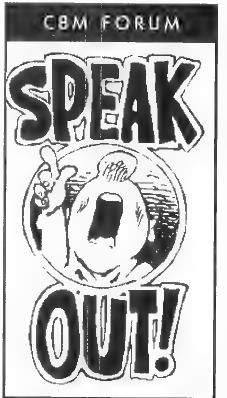
KEITH CONTARINO, GEORGIA
Here's what I think about what you think!

Just picked up a copy of CBM #28. WOW! What a nice issue. The Steranko piece was wonderful. He is one of my all-time favorites and the Nick Fury #1 he signed for me in Atlanta more years ago than I can remember is one of the more valued pieces in my collection.

I also enjoyed the rest of CBM especially the Guest Editorial section where not one but two of my friends were featured, Stephen Gentner and Jason Ewert. It was kind of Stephen to mention me as one of the "interesting" writers in Comics Source. Thanks Stephen. I would agree that the lag time in CS hurts some, but I still think Jon (not "John") is doing a good job on most of the articles. As part of that "diverse squirrely cadre of writers" he refers to, I also agree Gary has done a great job of holding them together and putting out a fine publication like CBM.

But.. (Gary, you know I couldn't write more than two paragraphs without disagreeing with something!) I think Stephen is wrong about older collectors not listening to the music of the old books. As you both know, I have written articles ranging from straight investment columns to ranting and raving about how the threat of Communism and my nightly dinner battles with my father shed light on how the Marvel Explosion (1961-1965) came about. I would say the investment articles were more like the "harp" (??) Stephen refers to but the articles on Marvel, Ditko, growing up with Barks etc. were more like "mush" (???) Guess what?? Most of the feedback I have gotten (and I think Gary and I know Jon will back this up) has been from those kind of articles. I think collectors are dying for more history, not less. Now, people who buy Wizard are not in this group. Hopefully, they are enjoying storing the stacks of Valiant and Image books they haven't even bothered to read

Jason makes some good points. While low grade copies of some books (Suspense #3, Detective #140, All Star #8, etc.) certainly command above Guide or even multiples of Guide prices, this is not true across the board. Jason uses the word "quality" to designate the books deserving those multiples. I prefer to use the term "in demand for whatever reason." I say this because I think Jason omits the single most important force driving the market...demand, pure and simple! The fact that a comic is very

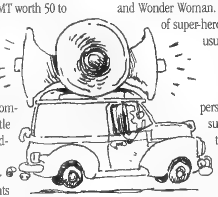


rare, or in Mint condition or both is virtually meaningless in collectibles. I'll use my old example of Atomic Rabbit #1, which is extremely hard to find and may be nonexistent in NM/MT. But so what? Other than Kevin Lasknitt and myself, there is no demand for the book. If the demand for Amazing Fantasy #15 existed for Atomic Rabbit #1 it would be a $50,000 book. Of course, books that are in demand and scarce and in high grade are the ones that go up the most and sell for the biggest multiples. I think it was Dan Greenhalgh at Showcase New England (Hi Dan!) that succinctly pointed out if Captain America #1 was as scarce as Marvel Comics #1, especially in high grade, it would sell in the Action #1, Detective #27 zone. Why? Because of the high demand. Demand is not created by condition or scarcity. In fact, no one can explain why certain books are in high demand and others are not. For example, remember 20 years ago or so?? (Most probably don't) The four big Golden Age books were Action #1, Marvel Comics #1, Detective #27 and ... Four Color #9!! This was based on demand. Logically the first Barks Donald Duck should be up there with the other three. But the demand for Ducks never kept pace with superheroes. Why? I have some ideas, but nobody knows for sure. Look at Suspense #3 or Young Men #24. They've been around for years, everyone knew about them. Then, all of a sudden, about 2 1/2 to 3 years ago, EVERYBODY wants them. Go figure. Be that as it may, everyone out there needs to read Jason's editorial two or three times. He nails so many important facets of our hobby right on the head. Overpricing kills or stagnates any market. Look at Batman #428 or Valiants. Nuff said!

I don't know Ken Barnes but far be it from me not to comment on his piece. Ken... don't take pricing structures personally even if they devalue your collection. You refer to Four Color #62 as being "important." To whom? How many people reading your editorial even knew Four Color #62 was "Donald Duck Finds Frozen Gold" without looking it up? I'm a duck collector and a Barks collector and even I've got to wonder why you think Frozen Gold is important. It's not rare and I don't think the story is nearly as interesting as "Lost in the Andes" or, of course, "Christmas for Shacktown". It certainly is not as scarce as Vacation Parade #1 and probably not much harder to find than Volcano Valley, Bear Mountain or Voodoo Hoodoo. Surely Atom Bomb is rarer and more important. Sorry...as a Duck fanatic I tend to ramble. The reason Frozen Gold is achieving its current price structure is based on demand. Let's face it, as much as I love Ducks, they are not in high demand. Personally I'd like to see them all DECREASE in value so I could afford a nicer copies. I'd love to get a NM Pirates Gold for $1,000. Or a

NM Shacktown for $150. For that matter, as a collector I'd love to see this entire Gold/Silver market DIE!!! Then I could get a Batman #1 for $1,000 or less! But-that's not going to happen. The investor part of me doesn't want that to happen, of course.

Ken also wants to use stamps and coins in his argument. I used to do this but it is too "apples and oranges" to consider. He's right…comics in "Good" condition have an intrinsic value but how in God's name does that fact lead to his next statement…"therefore ratios beyond 20 to 1 are impossible"? If the "intrinsic" value of a Good Fantasy #15 is say $800, why isn't a NM/MT worth 50 to 60 times that? If a good X-Men #94 is worth $100 on the open market, why isn't a NM/MT worth $500? The point is this…some books are common and under little demand in low or mid-grade but extremely rare and sought after in NM. Unfortunately, as Ken points out the same is true on many books in VF or VF+. We are seeing just this phenomenon in the Silver Age Marvel market. Nice VF copies of books like Spider-Man #14 are worth 1/2 that of NM/MT copies. Look at Spider-Man #1. I saw numerous very nice VF copies at New York in the $10,000 to $12,000 range. The only NM+ copy I saw a private collector had and it wasn't for sale, but a NM copy sold before NY for $29,000. A VF/NM or NM- should be in the $18,000-$20,000 range. Ken exaggerates with his $100,000 VF+/NM- difference but his point is well taken. Do we ever need grading standards in this industry? Do we need a grading service NOT selling comics? You bet we do! It is our responsibility as collectors, dealers, investors, whatever, to accurately grade. There is a huge difference between VF and NM in price. We all need to be honest and strict graders. I didn't read Jim Payette's article but agree with him 100% that Good to Mint is way, way too narrow. It's probably reasonable on many Silver Age books that Fine or Fine+ are low grade and we should see a 1-2-5-30 or 40 ratio of Good/Fine/VF/Mint. Why? Because the market actually reflects this.



Well, I could ramble forever. Good to see CBM and hope all are well on the Left Coast, especially the Carters, Naimans, Casalis and the only human alive that thinks Sgt. Rock could hang with Fury-Mick Rabin. Go Braves!

DOUG MABRY
Are you sure Showcase #4 started the Silver Age?

The Silver Age began in 1956 with Showcase #4, right? Or maybe it was the first appearance of J'onn J'onzz in Detective #225 (November 1955). Well, at any rate, there hadn't been any other super-hero comics in years except for Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman. "The stands were void of super-heroes." At least, that's the usual answer. Ah, but let's take a look back at those years and see if we can get a little perspective as to how the super-hero timeline fits together.

The argument over what constitutes the end of the Golden Age is an area that we won't get into here, but I recently heard suggested that if could be considered the last issue of All-Star Comics #57 (Feb/Mar 1951). Whether or not it's the true end of the Golden Age is irrelevant to our topic, but it's a good reference point for us. So keep in mind that the All-American characters were still being published until 1951. Now let's take a look back at some other books and see how they fit into the big picture.

In December 1950, Marvel released Marvel Boy #1. It lasted until issue #2, February 1951. Hardly an impressive run, but it does show that Marvel at least felt that super-heroes were worth a shot.

Next, we have Airboy. Airboy had a long and distinguished run for Hillman, not surrendering to cancellation until May 1953. Is Airboy technically a super-hero? Well, maybe not, but he is usually included in talks about super-heroes, so we'll include him here.

Next to expire was Quality Comics' Doll Man, who made it all the way to October 1953. Not bad for such a little guy.

Now, here we have a little blip on our chart, Captain 3-D #1, featuring art from Kirby and Ditko. It only lasted one issue during the 3-D craze (December 1953), but, hey, with art like that it definitely counts.

One of the most notorious books on our survey is Marvel Family #89, the last issue of any of the Captain Marvel books for nineteen years. Sales had dropped quite a bit by the end of the run, but who knows what would have happened if Fawcett hadn't been involved in that lawsuit with DC? After all, it's less than three years from this point to Showcase #4. If Fawcett could have held on for just a little bit longer, they might have made a comeback during the Silver Age revival.

The book that managed to hang on for the longest time, however, is another book from Quality… Plastic Man by the great Jack Cole. Although the tone of the book changed greatly toward the end, old "Plas" made it all the way up to the dawn of the Silver Age. His last issue was on the stands at the same time as Showcase #4, October 1956. Gee, does that make Plastic Man #64 the first Silver Age Plastic Man?

Now we come to the really interesting bit. Beginning in 1954, we have several heroes that are either temporarily revived or are brand new characters. It began with the heroes from Timely/Atlas/Marvel: Captain America, Sub-Mariner, and the Human Torch. Either all or some of them appeared in Young Men #24 (December 1953) to #28 (June 1954); Men's Adventures #27 (May 1954) and #28 (July 1954); Captain America Comics #76 (May 1954) to #78 (September 1954); and Sub-Mariner #33 (April 1954) to #42 (October 1955). So, their combined appearances ran from December 1953 to October 1955, just one year shy of the magic date.

A new character that arrived on the scene in late 1954 was Captain Flash. This comic featured nice art by a guy named Sekowsky, who would later go on to be one of the most loved or hated artists of the Silver Age, depending on who you ask. The back-up story was Tomboy, a young teen-age girl with no real powers who dressed up in a costume and fought adult criminals. She looked like she might have been modeled on Haley Mills. (Note: Haley Mills made her debut in a movie entitled "Tiger Bay" [continental, 1959] at the age of 13; five years, after the 1954 arrival of Captain Flash and Tomboy.) Well, Captain Flash lasted four

issues, from November 1954 to July 1955. He then vanished in a ...well, you know.

The next character was the Black Cobra, an old hero revived by those good folks at Ajax/Farrell. Black Cobra only lasted three issues, from Oct/Nov 1954 to Feb/Mar 1955. Hold on now, because here's where they start to come faster.

Phantom Lady was also revived by Ajax, with at least some art by Matt Baker. Her revival lasted from #1 Dec/Jan 1954/55 to #4 June 1955.

Blue Beetle experienced one of his many revivals in Space Adventures in Oct/Nov 1954 to Dec/Jan 1954/55, and then was given his own book in February 1955. It lasted until August 1955, for a combined total of six issues between both books.

Thrills of Tomorrow gave us two issues of reprinted Jack Kirby "Stuntman" stories in February and April 1955.

The Black Cat was also revived in February of 1955. She lasted three issues this time around, ending in October 1955.

A character called the Avenger debuted in 1955. Clad in a red costume with a big "A" on his chest, this character from Magazine Enterprises went for four issues, ending in July/Aug. 1955.

Another ME offering was Strong Man, a ...well, a strong man in a leopard skin costume. The decent Bob Powell art couldn't save this uninspired character, and he too disappeared after only four issues. His run was from Mar/Apr 1955 to Jul/Aug 1955.

Ajax must have had high hopes for a superhero revival, because in May 1955 they tried again with a character called Wonder Boy. First appearing in Terrific Comics featuring Wonder Boy in March 1955, he was then given his own title for two issues ending in July 1955. These issues also featured Phantom Lady back-up stories.

In November 1955, DC tentatively entered a new character into the market in Detective Comics #225. Always cautious, DC merely gave him back-up stories for the next several years.

In August 1955, Charlton released a comic called Danny Blaze. This book which featured "...authentic stories with all the real-life glamour of fire-fighting" predated Showcase #1 by more than six months. It didn't catch on for Charlton, either, because with issue #3 dated March 1956, the title changed to Nature Boy, a hero who wore a yellow shirt and blue shorts and was master of "wind, rain, and fire". Nature Boy lasted three issues, ending in February 1957. This book is also interesting because issue #3 also features the origin of Blue Beetle. This series is great because it really looks like Charlton beat DC to the punch in introducing both fire-fighting characters and super-heroes, leaving DC to play catch-up. After all, it was six months between Danny Blaze #1 and Showcase #1, and then six months between Nature Boy #3 and Showcase #4. Six months would be just about right for DC to have seen the books on the stands, commission their own versions, and then get the DC version on the stands.

Whatever the reason for trying super-heroes again, in September of 1956, DC released Showcase #4, the first appearance of the character who would become known as the "Silver Age" Flash. It's interesting to speculate whether or not the choice for which character to bring back was decided in response to the Captain Flash character. With Captain Flash appearing a little over a year earlier, perhaps someone at DC saw the book on the stands and decided that they had better put out an issue of their own Flash in order to make sure they maintained rights to the name. It would put a whole new slant on things if it was found out that the character that started the Silver Age was a throwaway character published solely to protect the rights to the Flash name.

Now, let's put this all in perspective. For years conventional wisdom has held that after the 1940's, super-hero comics ceased to be (with the exception of the three major DC heroes). It was said that poor super-hero fans were starving for books, with none to be found. Then DC came along and in a fit of inspiration revived the Flash and started the Silver Age. Well, the inspiration was there, but some of it may have been from the other super-hero books popping up from other companies.

This presents a confusing picture. There were clearly several super-hero books being produced at that time, quite a few more than is commonly thought. If super-hero comic sales were so bad, then why the sudden burst of new ones? But if sales were good, why all of the cancellations?

Well, at any rate, it does tend to argue for Showcase #4 being the first Silver Age book. After all, if the only criteria was which book came out first, we might be paying $20,000.00 for a Nature Boy #3... ■

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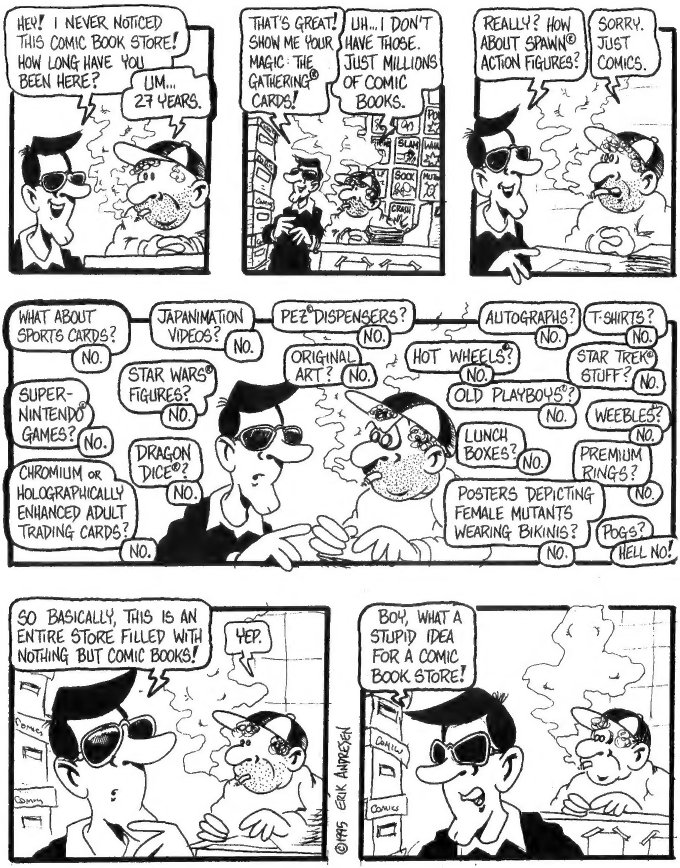
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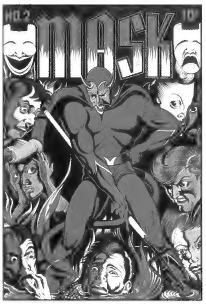

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